

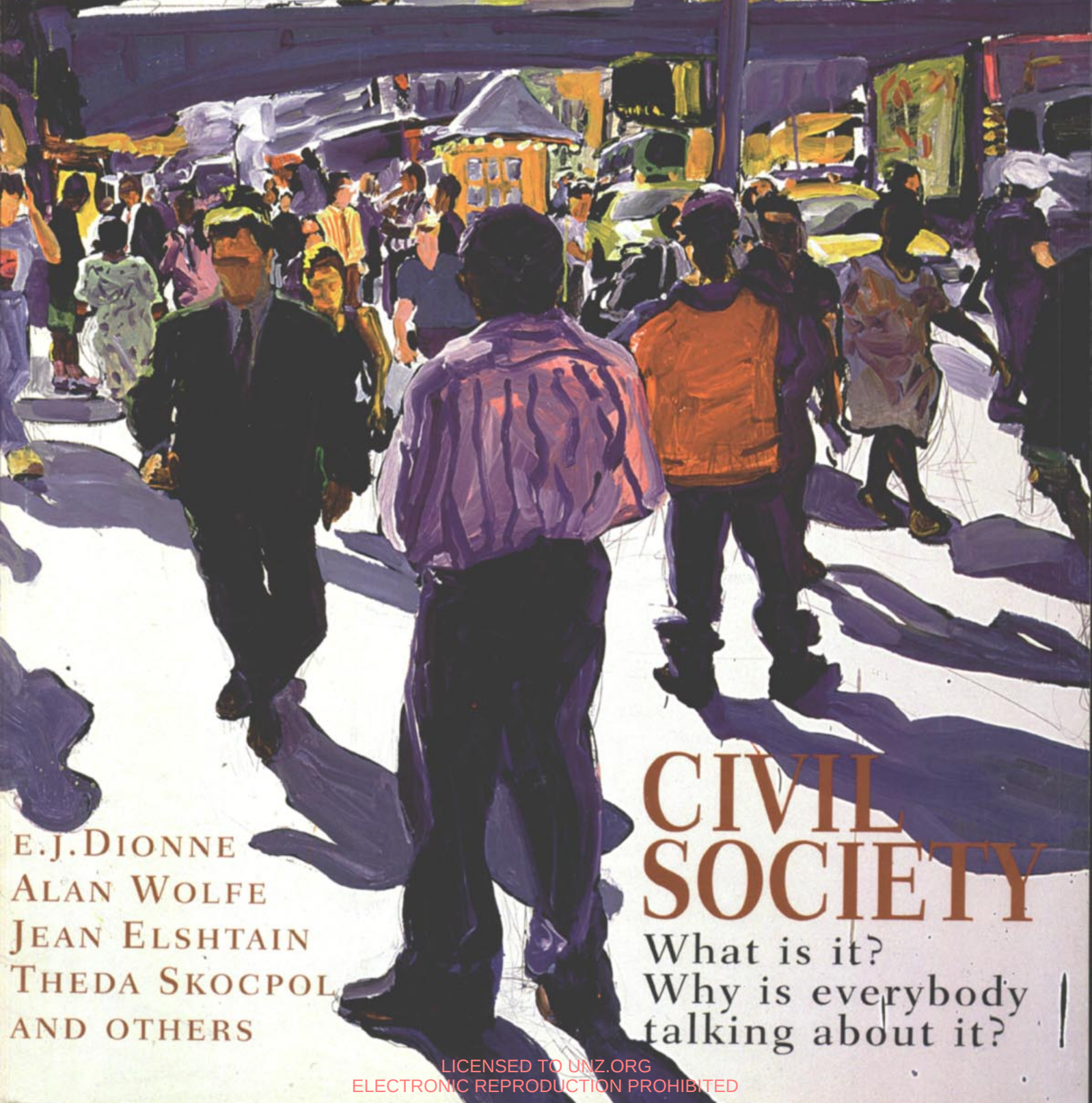
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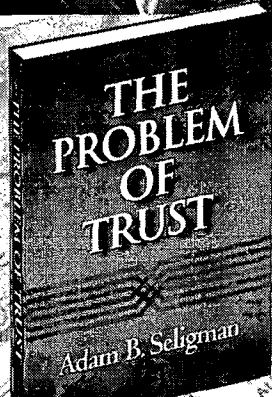
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<http://www.brook.edu>***A CONSIDERED OPINION****Recreating the Civil**

It was a happy coincidence that the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, which was held in Philadelphia this past April, should have been convened at a time when so many Americans are asking how we can reinvigorate our sense of civic virtue. Conceptions of what constitutes a "civil society" may differ as to details, but most people would probably agree that, at a minimum, a civil society is one whose members care about each other and about the well-being of the community as a whole.

What the Presidents' Summit did was to crystallize this concern around a coherent program aimed at helping our nation's youth. During my travels throughout the country, visiting inner-city neighborhoods and talking to the kids I've met there, I have been struck again and again by the stark differences between their childhoods and my own. When I was growing up in the Bronx, I wasn't rich—at least not in a material sense—but I had the matchless blessing of being reared by two devoted parents, backed up by a platoon of doting aunts and uncles, who gave me the love, discipline, and motivation I needed to succeed.

Too many of today's kids are not getting the same kind of nurturing environment that I—and most Americans—once took for granted. Too many of today's kids are growing up in dysfunctional families. Too many are being lost to child abuse, street violence, and other social pathologies. Too many are having children while they are still children

themselves. Too many are dropping out of school or are not getting the quality of education they need to get good jobs when they graduate. As a result, too many kids are growing up unable to find their places in today's complex, information-driven economy. Too many are heading for stunted lives of dependency or crime.

As many as 15 million youngsters are "at risk" in today's America. They are in danger of being lost for good unless the more fortunate among us step forward and lend a hand. At the Presidents' Summit in Philadelphia, hundreds of our nation's leaders endorsed five basic resources that our young people need to become successful adults: (1) an ongoing relationship with a caring adult or mentor; (2) safe places to learn and grow during nonschool hours; (3) a healthy start and a healthy future; (4) a marketable skill through effective education; and (5) an opportunity to give back through community service. The Summit participants pledged to make these resources available to at least two million youths by the year 2000. An ongoing campaign called America's Promise, which I chair, has been launched to redeem that pledge.

The response to our appeal has been highly gratifying. Nonprofit organizations, service clubs, educational institutions, houses

Gen. Colin L. Powell USA (Ret.) was chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1989 to 1993. He was general chairman of the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, which met in Philadelphia over April 27–29, 1997, and is chairman of its successor organization, America's Promise—the Alliance for Youth.

By General Colin L. Powell USA (Ret.)

Society—One Child at a Time



LISA QUINONES/BLACK STAR

employees paid time off to do volunteer work in their communities. Timberland, for example, is giving its employees 40 hours of compensated leave a year. NationsBank is establish-

THROUGH THESE GRASSROOTS EFFORTS, WE ARE HELPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AMERICANS TO GROW UP TO BE GOOD CITIZENS.

ing 25 "Make a Difference Centers" to provide after-school programs for thousands of youngsters, including one-on-one homework assistance and tutoring.

The list of givers is growing longer all the time. Moreover, 30

of faith, corporations, and businesses large and small have all come forward to help us put the five resources in reach of needy youngsters.

McDonalds-Ronald McDonald House Charities have committed \$100 million to an ambitious program supporting all five basic resources. The Oracle Corporation has also made a \$100 million commitment to endow "Oracle's Promise"—a new foundation devoted to putting a computer on every child's desk in grades K-12 in the United States. Allstate is increasing its support for the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and the company's own "Street Smart" program. Other companies are giving

states and nearly 180 communities have announced their own summits in support of this effort. Some state and local summits have already been held. Through these grassroots efforts, we are helping the next generation of Americans to grow up to be good citizens, and we are reacquainting the present generation of Americans with the need to break down the barriers of race, class, and politics that divide us—which will help make us a more united and caring nation.

America's Promise cannot restore the civil society by itself. But rallying Americans around a campaign to help young people get a decent start in life is a big step in the right direction. ■

CIVIL NOW



SOCIETY?

BY E. J. DIONNE, JR.

“Civil society” sounds so nice that few people can believe something serious lies behind the debate the idea has provoked.

Sometimes, the word “civil” is given pride of place and the phrase is taken to mean a society where people treat each other with kindness and respect, avoiding the nastiness we have come to associate with 30-second political ads and a certain kind of televised brawl.

More formally, civil society refers to an array of fine institutions that nobody can possibly be against: churches that run great teen pregnancy and after-school programs, neighborhood crime watch groups, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Little Leagues, book clubs, veterans groups, Shriners and Elks. What’s to fight about? Aside from bashing overly zealous parent-fans, how many people are prepared to take the negative side of The Little League Argument?

And the phrase is further blessed by its association with the brave people in Eastern Europe who used it in their struggle against Communism. They discovered that while they lived under dictatorships, even the most efficient police states could not stamp out all vestiges of independent social life that survived in churches and cafes and workplaces and families. The Eastern European rebels used these enclaves of “civil society” to incubate free societies which ultimately triumphed.

Not only does the civil society idea meet with skepticism because of its almost impossibly wholesome associations, it also arouses sensible suspicion because every side wants to use it for its own purposes. “Some ideas fail because they never make the light of day,” Alan Wolfe argues in these pages. “The idea of civil society, many critics charged, failed because it became too popular.”

Wolfe rightly finds this an insufficient indictment of the idea, but it’s worth asking nevertheless: why is the civil society concept so popular? Why

are so many scholars counting up how many organizations we belong to? Why do Little Leagues and churches seem to matter so much now to people whose concerns, to put it gently, ran elsewhere a decade ago? Why is so much passion invested in arguments over whether or not civil society is on the decline—whether, in Professor Robert Putnam’s now famous phrase, more of us are “bowling alone”? Why is so much hope being invested in the voluntary sector?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ISSUE

The essays that follow try to answer these and other questions. Those by Wolfe and Jean Bethke Elshtain, two pioneers in this argument, discuss civil society’s importance directly. The debate between Theda Skocpol and William Schambra shows how two people devoted to voluntary civil and civic action can disagree sharply about the roots of such engagement. They disagree in particular on the role of national institutions and government in promoting a vibrant independent sector. Their essays suggest that declaring how important civil society is does not end the debate. On the contrary, it marks the beginning of a new debate. David Kuo, meanwhile, offers the reflections of a conservative activist who, through a civil society prism, has come to appreciate some of the contributions of liberalism. He suggests how liberals might, in turn, learn a thing or two from conservatives. The tone of his essay points to the possibility that the civil society discussion itself might make the broader political debate a bit more civil.

William Galston and Peter Levine perform a large service by sifting through piles of data and an often acerbic academic argument to give a highly nuanced view of whether or not civil society is on

E.J. Dionne, Jr., is a columnist for the Washington Post and a senior fellow in the Brookings Governmental Studies program. He is the author, most recently, of They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era (Simon and Schuster, 1996).



SIXTEEN EAST GAY STREET, GEORGE BELLOW'S, 1923-24, ART RESOURCE, NY

the decline in the United States. Their conclusion, at once sensible and provocative, is that while association-building is far from dead, the associations now being built appear less likely than those of the past to foster civic involvement and political participation. "Not all associations promote democratic health in the same way or to the same extent," they note. A corollary finding is that it is a mistake to see the decline in political participation as translating automatically into a decline in social activism and volunteering. In an important contribution to the empirical argument, they suggest that social activism may be increasing as political activism declines.

John DiIulio points to signs of hope in the inner city by throwing light on the immense social capacity of local churches and the successes of faith-based programs that solve problems one person, one soul at a time. DiIulio asks those concerned about inner-city poverty to consider the huge burden that would be thrown on government if churches, synagogues, and mosques suddenly stopped their good work. Replacing their efforts "would cost literally tens of millions to provide at public expense."

Bruce Katz tries to solve a puzzle: how is it that although the capacity and competence of community development organizations, local churches, and neighborhood groups has manifestly expanded—exactly as DiIulio says—the social and economic situation of so many inner-city areas has deteriorated? Katz points to a sharp rise in concentrated poverty as the answer, showing how the problems faced by such neighborhoods have multiplied even faster than the capacity to solve them.

The DiIulio and Katz essays taken together point to a highly promising dialogue about both the profound importance of voluntary action rooted in religious and local commitment and the structural limits that the new concentrated poverty may place on such efforts. One might conclude that the activities DiIulio describes are indispensable and worthy of much more support, but that such support will necessarily involve changes in the way metropolitan economies work and in government policies that hurt both inner cities and near suburbs. DiIulio, citing former Secretary of Education William Bennett, also offers a useful warning: it's an illusion to pretend that if government retreats from problem-solving, civil society will be miraculously reborn. The requirement, as DiIulio argues, is not retreat, but a more fruitful collaboration between the institutions of government and those of civil society.

With verve and common sense, Jane Eisner underscores the extent to which the voluntary sector needs support—and organization. In all the discussions of the power of volunteerism, few confront such practical issues as: you can't paint a house without paintbrushes. Lurking behind that point is a large and important question: are we tossing huge responsibilities

over to the voluntary sector without thinking first about how to equip volunteers and their organizations with the tools that make for success? Pam Solo, of the Institute for Civil Society, partners with Brookings in our explorations, shows success is certainly possible by describing several organizations doing the practical work of civil society. Colin Powell, in his *Considered Opinion*, calls for greater commitment from both individuals and the corporate sector to such endeavors, especially helping disadvantaged young Americans.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS SELF-CRITICISM

The civil society debate is not a flash in the pan or a trendy effort to inject the appearance of life into a national debate that is failing to engage the country. The civil society idea is popular because it responds to problems inherent in other ideas. Its rise reflects three developments with deep roots.

The first is a move among thinkers on both left and right to

reflect on the failures of their respective sides and face evidence that may be inconvenient to their own arguments. The second is a widespread sense that changes in the economy and in the organization of work, family, and neighborhood have outpaced—if, one can hope, only temporarily—the capacity of older forms of civic and associational life to help individuals and communities cope with the change. The third is the impact of an antigovernment mood that has been part of American life since the 1970s. The interest in civil society reflects both a reaction against government and a desire to reconstruct energetic government on stronger ground.

The precursor to today's civil society debate was the discussion engendered by an important essay called "To Empower People," written by Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus and published in 1977 by the American Enterprise Institute.

Berger and Neuhaus made the case for "mediating structures"—structures that "mediated" between "the individual in his private life and the large institutions of public life." The mediating structures they had in mind were church, family, neighborhood, and voluntary associations. Their point was that, at a minimum, government should not undercut mediating structures and, better yet, where possible should try to strengthen and support them. They explicitly criticized liberals for a tendency "to be blind to the political (as distinct from private) functions of mediating structures." Liberalism's "main feature," they asserted, was "a commitment to government action toward greater social justice within the existing system," which, in turn, translated into a reluctance to consider how an agenda for social justice might be more effectively pursued through associations independent of government.

The Berger-Neuhaus thesis gave conservatives a powerful framework for their criticisms of the welfare state. Politically, it could be seen as the manifesto of the "Reagan Democrat" who

THE CIVIL SOCIETY DEBATE IS NOT A FLASH IN THE PAN OR A TRENDY EFFORT TO INJECT THE APPEARANCE OF LIFE IN THE FLAT NATIONAL DEBATE. THE CIVIL SOCIETY IDEA IS POPULAR BECAUSE IT RESPONDS TO PROBLEMS INHERENT IN OTHER IDEAS.

still felt the tug of some of the New Deal's social commitments but warmed to Reagan's invocations of the value of "family, work, and neighborhood."

But the mediating structures idea also led to liberal self-criticism which laid the groundwork for the current liberal interest in civil society. Liberals, or at least many of them, came to accept (as Daniel Patrick Moynihan had argued in less receptive times) that the situation of the poor had worsened because of family breakdown, neighborhood violence, and a weakening of traditional local institutions and restraints. Social policies needed to address not only material poverty, but also crime, drug addiction, the rise of the single-parent family, and the issue of how values are generated and passed along to children. For liberals, this did not mean abandoning economic explanations for the situation of the inner city—the flight of jobs to suburbs described by William J. Wilson, for example—but supplementing them. It also meant a search for solutions that involved not only government, but, well, "mediating structures," including churches and families. If a new focus of social policy was to be how to promote "values" and "personal responsibility," social institutions outside of government would have to be mobilized.

The civil society argument then took another turn that should be credited in part to Alan Wolfe's argument in his pathbreaking book *Whose Keeper?* In a sense, Wolfe closed the circle that Berger and Neuhaus began to draw. If liberals were insufficiently attentive to the ways in which government impinged on the institutions of civil society, conservatives were not attentive enough to how the workings of the economic market could disrupt neighborhoods and family life. Civil society, after all, is greatly affected by the workings of both government and the market, but it is the sphere of life not defined either by politics or by market relations. As Wolfe noted, we spend most of our lives not "in government" or "in the market," but in this third sphere defined by friendships, loyalties, love, and personal values (such as altruism and intimacy) which are not, to say the least, the primary characteristics of market or political relationships. If the state could not be counted on to produce "values," neither could the market. Both the state and the market depended on civil society to do this work.

As Paul Starobin documented recently in *The National Journal*, many conservatives have come to agree that capitalism, all by itself, will not produce what they see as "good values," and may, at times, promote what most conservatives would call "bad values." William Bennett's critique of Hollywood, for example, led him to a broader argument about what the market doesn't do. "Unbridled capitalism is a problem," Bennett said at the National Press Club last year. "It may not be a problem for production, but it's a problem for human beings. It's a problem for the whole dimension of things we call the realm of values and human relationships." Starobin specifically ascribed the new questioning of pure capitalism to "conservatives active in what is known as the civil society movement." He added that such conservatives "are beginning to talk about modern capitalism in much the same terms as they discuss Big Government—as a disruptive, intrusive, morally untethered force that can rend the fabric of community life."

The argument of these conservatives is not so much anticapi-

talist as it is a statement about capitalism's limits. And it is also about the limits of a conservative strategy that sees dismantling government as the way to help the poor. Conservatives such as Senator Dan Coats and (in these essays) David Kuo have argued that *if* the conservatives hope to reduce the role of government, they will have to find ways to strengthen other sectors that are public but not governmental. Thus civil society.

Seen as a vehicle for self-criticism by both liberals and conservatives, the civil society idea might be summarized as an assertion about the limits of both government and the market: we will not be "saved" by either. If that minimum level of agreement is reached, where does the argument go from there?

SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

As both Alan Wolfe and Jean Bethke Elshtain note in their essays, many critics of the civil society idea see it as a form of nostalgia, a longing for the warm, encompassing (and closed) communities of the pre-modern era. Both rightly reject this criticism, but also note that it leads to a truth about the civil society idea: it is the assertion of a group of people who think that contemporary society is missing *something*.

The "something" that is missed is defined in different ways by different groups. Parents feel they are missing time with their kids by spending too much time at work. Members of an elite class deeply engaged in professional organizations worry that too much of their sociability is organized around what they do. Residents of crime-ridden neighborhoods miss the street corner and doorstep sociability made possible by physical security. People who move several times to get better jobs miss the continuity, familiarity, and sense of loyalty that come from residence in a stable neighborhood. Employees sense less loyalty from their employers after the recent waves of "downsizing" and "right sizing." Parents worry that they have lost control as values are transmitted to their children by outside forces, especially television.

In all these worries, there is, of course, a hint of nostalgia. We've had crime waves before. Americans have always been on the move and in search of new opportunities. One person's stable neighborhood is another person's stifling neighborhood (which is another reason Americans move a lot).

But not all of these concerns are nostalgic, and each is in its way rational. As Theda Skocpol argues here, professional associations are not the same as wider forms of association. Professionals "see themselves as specialized experts, not as 'trustees of community'." Crime can destroy a neighborhood's capacity to function. Parents are not crazy to disapprove of some, perhaps many, of the values transmitted by mass culture. The new division of work between men and women outside the home has not been matched by efforts to ease the impact of all this working on families and children.

Thus, the quest for new forms of civil society can be seen as a rational response to social change—not so much a rebellion against the modern world as a new attempt to deal with modernity's discontents and dislocations. The authors gathered here, and the many others urging a concern for civil society, are not claiming that civil society is hopelessly broken and that decline and doom await us all. Many (in these essays especially) see effer-

vescence and creativity in the effort to forge new forms of civil society. But they also assert that we are only at the beginning of this process and more social inventiveness is required.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL

The antigovernment mood feeds the civil society debate in two ways. It leads to demands to reduce government's role and to turn to the nongovernmental sector. But the antigovernment mood also suggests a disconnection between the state and the citizen. Defenders of America's Progressive and New Deal tradition argue that far from being enemies, a healthy national political culture and a healthy civil society are allies. Decay in either sphere can lead to decay in the other. Strong networks of association lead to a stronger sense of representation, greater political efficacy, an enhanced faith in the possibilities of politics.

In the short run, advocates of civil society might agree that whatever their political differences, democratic systems are in jeopardy if too many citizens feel disconnected not only from this or that political party or politician but also from forms of organizational life that give them an effective voice and a chance to accomplish what Harry Boyte, of the University of Minnesota, has usefully called "public work," acts of public

engagement designed not simply to help someone in need, but also to build up, improve, and solve problems within one's own community (or nation).

In the long run, there will be much debate (reflected at many points in this issue) over the extent to which civil society and government are allies or adversaries and over the relationship between the workings of the economy and healthy civic life. To go back to the Berger and Neuhaus question: what is government's role in promoting civil society? What is the responsibility of companies and employers to organize work so that a citizen, as Theodore Roosevelt put it, "will have time and energy to bear his share in the management of the community?" What are realistic expectations for the voluntary sector? How does "do good" volunteering relate to "community building" by those to whom "good" is presumably being done? This issue is offered in the hope of opening such questions rather than closing them.

The civil society argument is rooted in a conviction that this generation has the same capacity for social inventiveness as the Progressives whom Teddy Roosevelt led at the beginning of this century or the Americans whom Alexis de Tocqueville described almost a century earlier. What all the authors in this issue share is a belief that rekindling that spirit of social reconstruction is both essential and a realistic hope. ■

BEYOND THEORY *Civil Society in Action*

BY PAM SOLO

Theoretical discussions of "civil society" often leave people wondering: what does *that* mean and what is all the commotion about? The excitement arises from the realization that citizens, in their own communities—sometimes with the help of government, often without it—are trying to solve problems. Their projects challenge a cynicism deeply embedded in public life, an incivility that characterizes so much of the political culture, and a sense of futility that holds people back from public action and community involvement. The actions of neighborhood groups and regional coalitions suggest that entrepreneurship is alive and well in the social sphere.

The best way to understand what civil society is is to see it in action. Here is just a small sampling of the creative projects we at the Institute for Civil Society have run across (and in some cases supported) in our efforts to encourage the civic revival now taking root.

The Family Support Network, founded by Cheryl Honey, a former welfare mother, began as a small database in Bothell, Washington, that listed people and organizations able to support families in times of crisis. It is now a fully developed "yellow pages" that links community members with over 800 people in the Seattle area who share resources and do volunteer work. FSN also has its own FM radio program, "I Can Do That!," which not only matches service providers with those in need of services, but also focuses on policy issues. Communities across the United States are inviting Honey and her colleagues to help them set up their own FSNs.

The River Watch Network brings river communities together to learn about and protect their rivers. Working with RWN, community groups such as schools, businesses, service clubs, state and local government agencies, and conservation groups analyze ecosystems and create strategies to con-

serve rivers. A Rio Grande/Rio Bravo pilot project in Texas uses 30 trained volunteers, 10 of whom are now Texas-certified water quality monitors, to sample water twice monthly at nine sites, focusing on the health effects of using contaminated waters. Next year RWN plans to target other affected rivers and the communities surrounding them.

The Ten Point Coalition is a national coalition of African-American ministers targeting at-risk youth in their own communities. The coalition, modeled on Boston's Ten Point Coalition, reaches out to the most troubled young people, "adopting gangs," patrolling neighborhoods, counseling victims, and using churches as community centers. By forming partnerships with social service agencies and law enforcement officers, the coalition has significantly reduced violence by local youths. The Ten Point Coalition in Dorchester, Massachusetts, is also working to create new entrepreneurial businesses run by former gang members who in turn employ other former gang members.

The Harlem Community Association, a secular counterpart of the Ten Point Coalition, is run by men who have served long sentences in New York state prisons. These men reach out to would-be predators through recreational activities, individual and group counseling, and frank talk about life in prison. Their central message is that taking personal responsibility for one's actions is the first step in any successful rehabilitation process.

In a larger sense, that message goes to the heart of what the civil society sector is and does. All these community initiatives share the conviction that problem solving cannot be left to others. Effective government programs can make things better. But the best government policies have emerged from collaborative efforts among government, community institutions, and the private sector. And the most enduring social changes cannot simply be legislated by government. They arise from social action rooted in individual responsibility and accountability. ■

Pam Solo is president of the Institute for Civil Society.

IS CIVIL SOCIETY OBSOLETE?

REVISITING PREDICTIONS OF THE DECLINE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN *WHOSE KEEPER?*

Revivified during the 1980s after a long period of dormancy, the concept of civil society—those forms of communal and associational life which are organized neither by the self-interest of the market nor by the coercive potential of the state—introduced considerable fresh air into both the theory and practice of contemporary societies.

BY ALAN WOLFE

For activists, especially Eastern European dissidents struggling against Communist dictatorships, civil society offered a language of voluntarism and freedom. And for social scientists and political theorists everywhere, civil society served as a reminder that even in the modern world there was more to social life than political economy; while no one doubts the power of private companies and public government, families, neighborhoods, voluntary organizations, and spontaneous political movements nonetheless survived and, on occasion, could assume dramatic importance.

No wonder, then, that the idea of civil society went from theoretical and academic conceptualization to fodder for politicians in record time. Left, right, and center found something appealing in the idea. Senator Bill Bradley articulated the theory of civil society to the National Press Club; Senator Dan Coats introduced a series of bills in Congress to promote its recovery; and General Colin Powell spoke the language of civil society at the volunteer summit in Philadelphia. In Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, organizations were founded to promote civil society in American life.

SHRINERS' QUARTET, GRANT WOOD



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The publication of Robert Putnam's article "Bowling Alone" was greeted by unprecedented media and popular attention to a work of scholarship. While one could—and many did—challenge Putnam's data and interpretations, it was impossible to argue that interest in the idea of civil society was somehow manufactured or ungentle. Clearly the idea and the national mood worked in tandem.

TOO POPULAR FOR ITS OWN GOOD

Some ideas fail because they never make the light of day. The idea of civil society, many critics charged, failed because it became too popular. One hears this mostly among academics, who rightly, if often intemperately, see it as their mission to question any received or conventional wisdom. For Jean Cohen, who, with Andrew Arato, wrote a massive tome tracing

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM CHRISTOPHER



the intellectual history of civil society, the concept that originated out of Hegelian philosophy is inevitably corrupted and cheapened when American politicians try to use it in their speeches. Along similar lines, Adam Seligman argues for "the inadequacy of the idea of civil society as a solution to . . . contemporary impasses." Modern life, Seligman writes, requires ways in which large-scale, impersonal societies can generate trust among strangers, but civil society implies small-scale worlds of personal relationships that are what Seligman calls "presociological" in nature. Civil society, from his perspective, is an anachronism.

While one ought always to welcome criticism of any idea, these kinds of theoretical points strike me as off the mark. It is certainly useful to inquire into the origins of the term civil society and to be reminded of its context in 18th-century Scotland or 19th-century Germany, but just about all the terms we use today meant something different when they were introduced. When Adam Smith talked about the market, a term he actually

used rarely, the systems of exchange he had in mind bear little resemblance to the impersonal, complex, and rule-driven methods of seeking to maximize return that the term has taken on in contemporary microeconomic theory. The same thing applies to a term like civil society. In the writings of Hegel, it may have referred, in Seligman's words, to a realm in which "free, self-determining individuality sets forth its claims for satisfaction of its wants and personal autonomy," but that does not prevent us from using the term today to describe families, churches, and neighborhood associations—so long as we are clear that we are doing so.

Nor is it persuasive to argue, as some critics do, that civil society is a term appropriate to Eastern Europeans trying to carve out free space in a corrupt Communist system, but not to Americans thinking about voluntarism. If anything, an understanding of civil society as a realm standing between the market and the state is more relevant to contemporary American experience than it is to the situation in former Communist countries. Eastern Europe is experiencing the traumas of the transition to capitalism. Trust, cooperation, and altruism—behaviors generally associated with the virtues of civil society—are not much in evidence; crime, cheating, and rampant suspicion are. Events in that part of the world since 1989 suggest that Eastern European countries will have to pass through some of the more unpleasant dynamics of pure market economies before they will be ready for civil society. Americans, by contrast, have already had their robber barons. Despite our own dispositions toward unfettered capitalism, we have much more strongly developed social institutions capable of cultivating civil society than do Eastern Europeans.

The question is not whether academics and politicians are using the term civil society correctly; it is whether the reality they are trying to capture when they use the term is accurate.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN DECLINE?

A more valuable criticism of the idea of civil society is that writers like Putnam and me, who make the case that civil society has declined, have our facts wrong.

Implicit in this criticism is not just the question of whether soccer leagues are an effective replacement for bowling leagues or whether television is the culprit for declining rates of civic engagement. Rather, moral and political world views clash where the

institutions of civil society are presumed to exist. For many feminists, for example, the whole idea that civil society is in decline can be interpreted as part of the backlash against women's entry into the workforce, since it was women historically who assumed the burdens of family and communal life.

But it is not just feminists who advance this line of argument. The feminist critique, rather, is shorthand for a defense of modernity against nostalgia. Women's entry into the labor force is just one of many changes in America since the 1950s that can be understood as part of the desire of individuals to have more control over their lives. Others might include greater social and economic mobility, the breakup of neighborhoods organized along lines of racial caste and ethnic homogeneity, and the desires of the young (and the old) for more autonomy. Defending those changes, writers in this tradition argue that we ought to scrutinize carefully any claims that a past golden age was more wholesome than present discontents, if for no other reason than to check the propensity of social critics to romanticize an era which, however communal it might seem in retrospect, gave people less freedom than they have now.

I feel attracted to both sides in this debate. My book, *Whose Keeper? Social Science and Moral Obligation*, published in 1989, was one of the first attempts to take the concept of civil society as it had emerged in Eastern Europe earlier in the decade and apply it to modern Western societies. In that book I spent considerable time comparing the United States, which relies more on the market, with Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, where the state plays a major role. Is there any evidence, I asked, that both kinds of societies, no matter how different in the institutions they use to fulfill moral obligations, are nonetheless similar in neglecting a third realm of social life which is neither economic nor political? My conclusion—based on such indicators of voluntary activity as blood donations, charitable giving, and the treatment of the young and the elderly—was that both did indeed tend to neglect the role of civil society. My book was written from the perspective that civil society would hardly be worth discussing unless it was in danger.

At the same time, I shared the political perspective of the anti-nostalgia camp.

Worried that my book would be interpreted as a call to return to a world of racial caste and gender discrimination, I wrote that a healthy realm of civil society was necessary, not to reject modernity, but to complete its trajectory. Already then, and even more since, I felt a strong distaste for the Jeremiah-like social science practitioner whose description of America in decline seemed to have as much to do with his own distemper as with empirical reality. I hoped that at least parts of *Whose Keeper?* would be proven wrong, as indeed, parts of it were. Scandinavian societies, for one thing, reached the limit of their reliance on the state: Swedes retain their distaste for voluntarism, but they have been forced to cut back the welfare state, while the Danes, who do not like the Swedish cutbacks, have always had more tolerance than the Swedes for private schools or grass-roots organizations. And in America, the very fact that civil society became so popular a term suggested that my predictions of its weakening were premature.

Controversies over the presumed decline of civil society are deep and divisive, but they also serve as a model for how important ideas ought to be discussed. There seems little doubt that some of the more alarmist accounts of civil society's decline, including my own, were exaggerated. Robert Putnam's earlier formulations of the degree to which social capital has been depleted have been effectively criticized by a veritable academic and journalistic industry, but that only testifies to the power of Putnam's way of analyzing the problem, the initially persuasive nature of the data he assembled, and his skill at calling attention to this idea. The social sciences cannot be modeled exactly on the natural sciences, but they do have this one similarity with them: the hypotheses they advance must be subject to as vigorous a process of disconfirmation as possible, after which they ought to be reformulated and reworked to account for alternative data and interpretations. This is exactly what has happened to "Bowling Alone."

ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES

At the same time, there remains an important core of truth in Putnam's argument. When all the data and interpretations are sorted out, my guess is that the story will run something like this: those who worried

Controversies over the presumed decline of civil society are deep and divisive, but they also serve as a model for how important ideas ought to be discussed.

Civil society, in short, is not obsolete; it can never be. Without a realm of associational and communal life independent of the market and the state, we cannot experience the richness of citizenship and the rewards of personal and group responsibility.

that civil society was in decline were correct to suggest that something serious was taking place in that realm of social life which—whatever we call it—relies on cooperation, altruism, and intimacy. But those changes can best be understood as qualitative rather than quantitative in nature. It is not the number of organizations to which one belongs that matters. Nor is it whether they require active members or rely mostly on mailing lists. Americans retain their social and civic instincts, but they have little choice but to shape them to the new realities of two-career families, suburban life styles, and rapid career changes. There is little question that the world of civil society at century's end bears little relationship to the images Americans often have of how communal and associational life is supposed to work. There are, however, many open questions about what this new world of civil society looks like and whether it can play the role that important theories of democracy have assigned to civil society in the past.

Less likely to find civil society in neighborhoods, families, and churches, Americans are more likely to find it at the workplace, in cyberspace, and in forms of political participation that are less organized and more sporadic than traditional political parties. Can these newly emerging forms of civil society act as a buffer between the market and the state, protecting Americans from the consequences of selfishness on the one hand and coercive altruism on the other? Will they encourage people to practice political participation, learning through the local and the immediate what it means to be a citizen of the nation and even the world? Are they sufficient to encourage in people a sense of responsibility for both themselves and those with whom they share their society?

We will obviously not have definitive answers to these questions for some time, if ever. Still, I think the outlines of a general answer are already evident. If we listen carefully both to those who worry about civil society's decline and to their critics, we ought to come away impressed by the capacity of Americans to reinvent their worlds. The lament that civil society is in decline too often pays insufficient respect to this perpetual reinvention. It is a testimony to Americans that they constantly

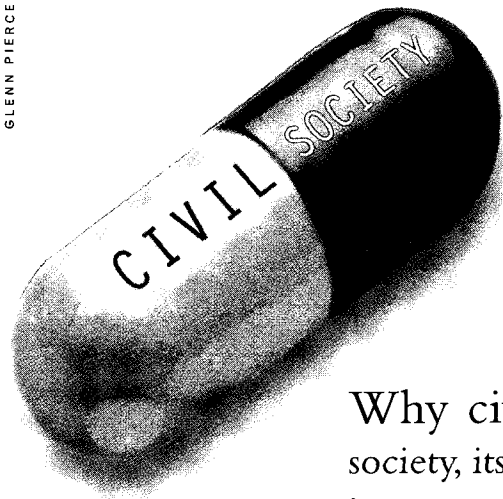
tinker with families, neighborhoods, and churches, searching for new forms that provide for both tradition and modernity, freedom and community. The nostalgia trap is a real one, and we are best off not falling into it.

At the same time, there is no guarantee that new forms of association will satisfy what civil society has often been called on to do. That is why, even as we avoid nostalgia, we also ought to listen to the worrisome tone in accounts of civil society's depletion. The fact that changes in the nature of the family benefit women does not necessarily mean that they benefit children. Organizations devoted to single-issue causes encourage political activism, but not in the same way as organizations more concerned with the public interest. Political campaigning which relies on television can educate voters and turn them out, but does not encourage responsibility in the same way that political parties once did. Churches which recruit new members in ways more similar to therapy than religion have their uses, but encouraging acceptance of the tragic limits to life is not one of them. The more things change, the less they stay the same.

Civil society, in short, is not obsolete; it can never be. Without a realm of associational and communal life independent of the market and the state, we cannot experience the richness of citizenship and the rewards of personal and group responsibility. But one term in the discussion of civil society is, or ought to be, obsolete, and that is the notion of decline. We ought to abolish from our language dealing with social institutions and practices a way of thinking which compares the present with some mythic past—as well as some hopeful future. What we need when we talk about society is not a sense of the worlds we have lost. We need to live in the world we have as best we can. So long as that is the case, civil society will always be around us—and can always be improved. ■

NOT A CURE-ALL

BY JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN



*Civil Society
Creates
Citizens;
It Does Not
Solve
Problems*

Why civil society? Why now? That we are debating civil society, its meaning and purpose, is in and of itself fascinating and important. Civil society as a concept has a long and uneven history. For the political philosopher Hegel, it signified a realm of markets and competition and contract whose divisions would be healed over only when the citizen entered the most universal of all ethical realms, that of the state. Civil society, in the Hegelian scheme of things, is a higher realm than that of individuals and families, but definitely lower in the overall picture than the more complete and perfect entity, the state. This European (or, perhaps, more properly “Germanic”) way of talking about civil society is not what those claiming the term for contemporary American political debate have in mind, however. For the most part, civil society in our context signifies a sphere of associational life that is, yes, “more” than families and “less” than states, and therein lie precisely its virtues rather than its defects or inadequacies. Americans have always been far more suspicious of the state and concentrations of power at the center than were European state-makers in the heroic era of state creation and legitimation.

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By civil society we have in mind the many forms of community and association that dot the landscape of a democratic culture—families (for we often put the family in civil society, although it is lodged there rather clumsily), churches, neighborhood groups, trade unions, self-help movements, volunteer activities of all sorts. Historically, political parties, too, were part of this picture, part of a network that lies outside the formal structure of state power. Observers of American democracy have long recognized the vital importance of civil society thus understood. Some have spoken of “mediating institutions” that lie between the individual and the government or state, locating each of us in a number of little estates, so to speak, which are themselves nested within wider, overlapping frameworks of sustaining and supporting institutions. This densely textured social ecology was—and remains—the ideal. For civil society is a realm that is neither individualist nor collectivist. It partakes of both the “I” and the “we.”

Democratic theorists (not all, but most) have issued cautions over the years that America as a democratic culture is perhaps uniquely dependent on vital peripheries, reliant on the vibrancy of political spaces other than or beneath those of the state. These included, of course, town councils and governmental structures of all sorts. But the aim throughout was to forestall concentrations of power at the core or on the top. This is the argument associated with Alexis de Tocqueville in his much cited classic, *Democracy in America*: only many small-scale civic bodies enable citizens to cultivate democratic virtues and to play an active role in the drama of democracy. Such participation turns on meaningful involvement in some form of community, by which is meant commitments and ties that locate the citizen in bonds of trust, reciprocity, mutuality, competence for the task at hand.

CIVIL SOCIETY’S CRITICS

This all sounds good. Too good to be true, argue some critics, who believe that the current civil society talk is at best a big evasion, at worst a pernicious invitation to triumphant localism. What is being evaded, in the critics’ view? The legitimate role of central government, for one thing, for there are tasks only the federal government can, or perhaps should, undertake. This compelling criticism can be addressed and worked out, it seems to me, by noting the ongoing complexities of our

federal system. As one example, a spate of Supreme Court decisions this past summer has had, among other things, the effect of opening the door to a revitalization of federalism, even state sovereignty or multiple sovereignties. When I was studying constitutional law in the early 1970s, federalism was considered pretty much a dead letter. Nobody gave a hoot about the 10th Amendment then. Now it is all the rage. Anthony Lewis, writing in the *New York Times*, dislikes the recent decisions, by “willful members of the Supreme Court” using “strained and rigid readings of the Constitution to strike down New Deal legislation as beyond Federal power.” According to Lewis and other representatives of the New Deal

type of big government liberalism, the Court is up to nothing less than rolling back history. But for some little government and libertarian conservatives, the Court hasn’t gone nearly far enough. As long as the Constitution exists, this movement back and forth is virtually guaranteed.

THE ACCUSATION OF NOSTALGIA

The civil society skeptics have other arrows in their quiver, however. The one most commonly shot—rather indiscriminately—skyward is what might be called the Accusation of Nostalgia. I hear it so often that I have an outstanding

wager that not a Q-and-A post-lecture or panel discussion will go by without at least one (often rather agitated) member of the audience jumping up to denounce fuzzy-minded evocations of a “Golden Age” and to remind me that there was such a thing as slavery, that awful things happened to Native Americans, that women for many years did not get to vote, and so on. Until recently, I responded with a predictable (and honest) set of caveats. No, this isn’t about a Golden Age. Of course, I know many bad things happened and are happening in America. No, I don’t think bigots should have a free hand. Of course, the Bill of Rights remains intact together with the enforcement of subsequent civil rights legislation. This means that the Ku Klux Klan (which comes up frequently, I find, as a peril if there is too much “localism”) and others are hauled into court.

But it strikes me increasingly that my shopping list of caveats is rather beside the point. For surely my interlocutors know that I know what they are telling me: that we need a federal government; that we must sometimes override “localism” in favor of something else; that a robust civil society isn’t



GLENN PIERCE

a cure-all and never was. I have decided that the Accusation of Nostalgia is not, after all, a response to my ostensible naïveté or tendency to gloss over past wickedness to skew an argument in my favor—which is what I long figured to be the case. It *is* about nostalgia. But it isn't mine, or that of other civil society advocates. Rather, it is a yearning on the part of the questioner himself or herself for a world without trade-offs and limits and political opponents with some clout that challenge the presuppositions of what might be called triumphant progressivism. What do I mean? I mean a stubborn refusal to come to grips with the fact that federal-government-centered solutions don't solve all problems or even, more disturbingly, that not all of our problems are fixable. The reality being avoided isn't just that one size doesn't necessarily fit all. It is that many of our troubles are troubles that will plague any mass postindustrial democracy. Civil society isn't so much about problem solving as about citizen and neighbor creating. Then and only then will we work together on other desired ends.

At one point in the not-too-distant past, those who called themselves progressives embraced the whole Idea of Progress as our version of the Marxist forward march of history to a predetermined goal. Things would get bigger and they would get better. We would become more rational and, as we did so, "local" attachments (often called parochial), commitments to family, religion, and neighborhood (often called backward), would fade. But that hasn't happened. Not only has it not happened, we are now in the midst of a reaffirmation and reassertion of particular identities and commitments, as in the classical Hegelian schema. We know that these can take unpleasant forms. But no civil society thinker wants a world in which there is only civil society—and the whole vast panoply of federal laws and their enforcement has been repealed. Making this clear, however, doesn't satisfy those hurling the charge of nostalgia.

But there is more—more nostalgia from those who accuse civil society thinkers of hankering for the "good old days." It goes like this. Much of 1960s politics was about "Thinking Big" in yet another sense. It was about what were called "movements." The civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, the student movement, the women's movement. Politics was happening, it appeared, only when tens of thousands of people took to the streets, sometimes in the name of

non-negotiable demands. But movement politics is inherently unstable, ephemeral, and geared toward publicity. The movement politics that had the greatest staying power is that which is institutionally tethered, as in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's mooring in black Baptist congregations. Many of those lodging the Nostalgia Complaint are themselves hankering for a return to big movement politics, it seems. It follows that civil society looks too, well, small; too modest; even, perhaps, too ameliorative.

But you don't have to be Max Weber, with his famous definition of politics as the patient boring of hard boards, to have arrived at the recognition that building and sustaining decent institutions is at the heart of the democratic matter.

And movements don't do that—don't build those ties of trust, reciprocity, accountability, mutual self-help over time. No, but institutions, sturdy but resilient institutions of democratic civil society, do. These institutions are, by definition, based on both giving and receiving; on creating a structure of expectations and molding reasonable and decent ways to meet those expectations.

A JOB WE CAN'T GIVE TO THE GOVERNMENT

Civil society creates spaces for the enactment of human projects, yes, but it also reminds us that this is a world of ties that bind. You

cannot have all the good things of democratic life and culture without accountability and duty. Isn't that what the "nostalgia" rebuff is finally all about? We want all sorts of things "solved" once and for all by policymakers and experts and others who will do this job for us. But civil society reminds us of what political philosopher Hannah Arendt called the "elementary problems of human living-together."

In an era—our own—when there is widespread agreement that American democracy is in some trouble, when a mountain of data has been offered up displaying our civic depletion and cynicism, we do well not to yearn for the confident reassurance that government can get things right if we but let it and give it leave to do its job. Government can help or hinder. But it is finally a task for the overlapping, plural associations of civic life in which citizens build and pass on those formative institutions—families, schools, churches, unions, and all the rest, including state and local governments—without which there is no democratic culture and, indeed, nothing for the federal government to either correct or curb or serve. ■



BUILDING COMMUNITY *top-down or bottom-up?*

AMERICA'S VOLUNTARY GROUPS THRIVE IN A NATIONAL NETWORK

Many conservatives tend to blame the rise of big government over the course of the 20th century for the decline of American civil society. Convinced that once upon a time voluntary groups flourished within “self-contained” local communities, they often cite Alexis de Tocqueville in support of the notion that in the early days of the American republic local voluntary groups prospered apart from politics or government above the local level. In reality, however, the great Frenchman’s *Democracy in America* repeatedly highlights the ways in which America’s nascent electoral democracy promoted all sorts of voluntary associations. And recent research by historians underscores the enduring importance of the U.S. federal government in promoting a vibrant civil society.

VOLUNTARY GROUPS AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT
Between the establishment of the Constitution and the 1830s, when Alexis de Tocqueville made his famous visit to our country, the fledgling United States enfranchised most free men and established competitive elections for state and national offices. As Richard Brown has shown, the Revolutionary War and subsequent electoral politics stimulated the formation of new voluntary groups in small villages and towns that otherwise might not have developed such groups. Recently, the historian Richard John has documented that the early republic developed an extraordinarily extensive and administratively efficient national postal system, encompassing even the remotest frontier hamlets. Much bigger than the postal systems of the bureaucratic European monarchies of

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that time, the U.S. postal system created a network of communication and stagecoach transportation that facilitated commerce, subsidized the dissemination of countless newspapers, stimulated popular political participation, and encouraged the activities of thousands of local and extralocal voluntary associations. One early reform association, the General Union for Promoting the Observance of the Christian Sabbath, took advantage of the mail system to organize a nationwide movement to demand the closing of post offices on Sunday! Temperance crusades and antislavery movements also spread their messages through the mail. In short, a strong and effective national state and a democratic civil society grew up together in early America.

Scholars have documented that the formation of voluntary groups in America came in major bursts. One took place before the Civil War, from the 1820s to the 1840s; others came after the Civil War, from the 1870s through the turn of the 20th century, and during the 1930s. Waves of voluntary group formation got under way during periods of intense political party mobilization and highly competitive national elections. The waves also coincided with periods of national cultural and political debate—focused before the Civil War on issues of morality and slavery and afterward on responses to industrialization and economic crises.

As part of a Civic Engagement Project at Harvard, my colleagues and I are assembling data on the emergence and growth of large voluntary associations in America. So far we have identified 55 “extensive associations”—defined as those that have enrolled 1 percent or more of American adults at any

point between 1790 and the present. These groups too were founded in waves that roughly coincided with the more general bursts of activity in voluntary group formation documented by other scholars.

Although the project has just begun developing a detailed “life history” of each of these 55 groups, already it is obvious that many groups launched during the 1800s survived and flourished into the 20th century. In fact, more than four-fifths of all extensive associations ever founded still exist today. As U.S. politics became more nationally focused around the Civil War, World War I, the New Deal, World War II, and the Cold War, the voluntary associations did not wither away. On the contrary, many established ones added new local and state units, recruited more individual members, and branched into new activities. For some groups, membership dipped during the Depression when people could not afford to pay dues. Some of those groups never recovered, but others reached further membership peaks during the 1960s and 1970s.

Contrary to the conservative view that federal social policies are harmful to voluntary groups, popularly rooted voluntary associations have often grown up in a mutually beneficial relationship with federal policies, including federal “tax-and-spend” programs. Civil War benefits, for example, stimulated the growth of the Grand Army of the Republic, which in turn promoted and helped to administer federal, state, and local support for veterans and their families. Early 20th-century local, state, and national policies to help mothers and children were championed by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, the National Congress of Mothers (later the PTA), and

the General Federation of Women's Clubs—groups that themselves expanded in part because of encouragement by government. State and federal efforts to support farmers and farm families have been championed and administered by associations such as the Grange and the American Farm Bureau Federation, the latter of which grew into a nationwide federation in conjunction with New Deal farm programs. New Deal Social Security legislation was originally encouraged by the Fraternal Order of Eagles and the Townsend Movement and has, in turn, stimulated the emergence of more recent local, state, and national associations of the elderly. The GI Bill of 1944 never would have taken the inclusive shape it did, opening up American higher education to hundreds of thousands

untary civic activism. If we dismantle or avoid national social provision in the future, we will harm civil society, not help it.

LOCAL EFFORTS: PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

Just as it is a mistake to see the federal government as automatically opposed to a healthy civil society, so too is it wrong to imagine that most American voluntary groups have been self-contained local efforts. Of course, particular groups have come and gone in communities and workplaces. But most local voluntary groups are directly or indirectly linked to parallel efforts across many communities, states, regions, and (often) the entire nation. People in local groups take heart or example from what others linked to them are doing at the

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of less privileged men, had not the American Legion taken the lead in writing generous legislation and encouraging public and congressional support for it. In turn, the GI Bill aided the postwar expansion of the Legion.

Those who say that America's modern systems of social provision have choked off—or crowded out—voluntary activity in civil society could not be more wrong. America's version of the modern social security state features core programs that give benefits in return for individuals' service to the nation, helping large numbers of middle-class and poorer citizens at the same time. This distinctively American social security state has gone hand in hand with locally and nationally vibrant vol-

same time elsewhere. As the social historian Alexander Hoffman has very aptly put it, "[s]ustained by both internal and external links, local institutions and organizations may best be understood as branch offices and local chapters...the building blocks of a 'nation of joiners'...Americans enlisted in local church groups, fraternal lodges, clubs, and other organizations that belonged to nationwide networks."

Studying just one place at a time, historians have at times mistakenly described local groups as purely idiosyncratic efforts. But systematic data are becoming available to help scholars sort things out more accurately. Over the past year, for example, Gerald Gamm and Robert Putnam have

collected a rich data set counting all the groups listed in directories from more than two dozen cities and towns for each decade between 1840 and 1940. About a third of the groups Gamm and Putnam counted were fraternal or sororal groups—which were central to American social and civic life from the 19th century until the 1960s. When the Civic Engagement Project at Harvard took a close look at the fraternal groups mentioned in Gamm and Putnam's local directories, we found that at least three-quarters of the fraternal group titles referred to units within translocal federations. Gamm and Putnam's data set also lists lots of churches, women's clubs, union halls, and service and professional groups—many of which my co-researchers and I believe were linked, during a period of American history that people often imagine to have been a time of localism, into regional or national networks of voluntary associations.

During the entire "modern" era of U.S. voluntarism, from the Civil War to around 1960, the quintessential form of translocal U.S. voluntarism was the federation, linking membership groups in cities and towns into networks with an organizational presence in each of 48–50 states, and at the same time tying the localities and states into a national organization that ran conventions and disseminated publications. Until recently, most large U.S. voluntary associations have had this three-tiered federal structure, paralleling that of U.S. government: local, state, and national. For U.S. voluntary associations, this federal form has been extraordinarily resilient and flexible. It has allowed local participation and democracy to be combined with group decisionmaking at state and national levels. It has allowed voluntary groups, if they chose, to relate to all levels of U.S. party politics, public administration, and legislative decisionmaking. It has also allowed for pluralism within unity, because local and state groups in particular parts of the country could pursue their own purposes, while at the same time cooperating for other purposes with groups in other places.

A nationwide voluntary association like the American Legion, for example, has deployed the federal form to perfection, as demonstrated by both Richard Jones and William Pencak. Local Legion posts run parades, supervise youth activities, help veterans and their families, and otherwise contribute to, and take vitality from, local communities across America. At the same time, the Legion can and does deliberate about, and then speak out on, state and national affairs. Like the PTA, the Knights of Columbus, countless fraternal groups, environmental groups, and many other U.S. voluntary federations, the American Legion demonstrates that local community involvement and an intense commitment to national identity have historically gone hand in hand in American democracy. The genius of the most successful and extensive U.S. voluntary efforts has been to make local and state and national commitments complement—rather than oppose—one another.

WHAT HAS GONE WRONG LATELY?

Recent social shifts in voluntary group activity, however, have made it harder for Americans to band together to get

things done—either through or in relationship to government. To be sure, thousands of grass-roots groups and national advocacy groups proliferated between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s—at the same time that the rise of professional groups, trade associations, and think tanks was turning Washington, D.C., into an "imperial" capital, as Kevin Phillips puts it. But there has been a "missing middle" in all this recent associational proliferation—an absence of links from national to local groups. With several notable exceptions, such as the Christian Coalition, few new local-state-national federations have been founded since the 1960s and 1970s. And many of the 30–40 nationwide voluntary federations that flourished in mid-20th-century America have gone into absolute as well as relative membership decline.

Both class and gender transformations have affected U.S. associations. Most large voluntary federations from the 1800s through the 1960s were cross-class, single-gender affairs. Business and professional people joined together with white-collar folks and perhaps with more privileged farmers or craft or industrial workers. But it was predominately men or women, not both together, who formed most of these multi-purpose voluntary associations. For much of American history, segregated male and female roles provided broad, shared identities through which huge numbers of Americans could band together across regional and class lines.

Until recently, male military veterans and higher-educated women have been leaders of nationally prestigious voluntary groups. But between 1974 and 1994 better educated women led the way in withdrawing from many types of voluntary federations, while simultaneously increasing their participation in occupationally based groups, such as unions and professional associations. The United States has also developed a very large professional-managerial upper-middle class, full of men (and now women too) who see themselves as specialized experts. Along with business people, today's managers and professionals seem more oriented to giving money to or working with national advocacy organizations than to climbing the local-state-national leadership ladders of traditional voluntary associations.

Better educated Americans, in short, have pulled out of broad community groups in record numbers since the mid-1970s, sometimes leaving behind people with high school educations or less. America's largest cross-class associations have withered. The best educated people are still participating in more groups overall, but not in the same groups as their less well-educated fellow citizens.

One answer to improving the nation's civic life will turn out, I believe, to lie in encouraging privileged Americans to rejoin—or recreate—the group settings in which they have daily chances to work with a broad cross-section of fellow citizens to address the nation's concerns. Americans need to place a new emphasis on working together, not just on "helping the poor." "Doing with" rather than "doing for" should be our watchword, if we want to revitalize the best traditions of American voluntarism. ■

LOCAL GROUPS ARE THE KEY TO AMERICA'S CIVIC RENEWAL

In a leaky, drafty former VFW hall on Milwaukee's northwest side, Pastor Gerald Saffold is busy rebuilding civil society. Of course, that's not how he would describe what he's doing. He would say that he's bringing souls to Christ—using his gift for music to draw inner-city teens into his “Unity in the Community” Choir, where former gang leaders and drug dealers help him write the songs and choreograph the dances they then perform all over the city.

Nonetheless, here is an unmistakable act of civic renewal, and under the least hospitable circumstances imaginable. Where before there were inner-city gangs of radically alienated, angry teens, there is emerging today a cohesive community, united in common endeavor, mutually developing skills of cooperation, leadership, and citizenship.

Yet, sadly, we as a society do not seem inclined to celebrate this simple gospel choir as a significant civic event. (And this, ironically, in the very face of Professor Robert Putnam's now famous discovery of the link between active choral societies and civic health.) Instead, we seem to be scanning the horizon for larger countrywide movements, for a



TREE-PLANTING GROUP, GRANT WOOD, 1937

BUILDING COMMUNITY

top-down or bottom-up?

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sweetening of our collective national mood, a restoration of national cohesiveness.

How did we arrive at this preoccupation with national cohesiveness? That is the story of the idea of national community—the central concept and overriding goal of 20th-century American progressive liberalism. Early in the 20th century, our leading political intellectuals—fore-

most among them Walter Lippmann, Herbert Croly, and John Dewey—concluded that the forces of modernity were rapidly and irretrievably eroding the traditional institutions of civil society. Within such institutions—small towns, churches, neighbor-

hoods, and ethnic and religious groups—Americans had traditionally governed themselves, established and preserved their own vigorous moral and religious cultures, cared for their most vulnerable, and met the human yearning for community.

But now, the progressives warned, the boundaries of these “island communities” had been hopelessly ruptured by modern technologies—the railroad, telegraph, telephone, the high-speed press, the corporation. These same technologies, however, made possible a new and dramatically improved form of community—the great national community. Elaborate communications and transportation networks would pull the nation together

even as they pulled the village apart. And the emerging social sciences would tame the disintegrative sociological and psychological effects of modernity, once enough experts in government, business, and the nonprofit sector were trained in them and organized into the imposing bureaucracies that would now “scientifically manage” all human affairs.

To bring comprehensive order to all these forces, Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed in 1912, we now required a far more powerful central government. At the apex of this new federal apparatus, a dynamic, articulate president would mount the “bully pulpit” and summon the American people out of modernity’s fragmented individualism into unified, high-minded national endeavor. The stirring rhetoric of national crisis and war would provide the metaphors needed to make the American people sense, as the late Robert Nisbet put it, “their mystic national oneness.”

This century’s political life has been dominated by the project of building a great national community or family or village, peaking in Lyndon Johnson’s effort to “turn unity of interest into unity of purpose, and unity of goals into unity in the Great Society.” We have been exhorted by Franklin Roosevelt to unite in the face of the Great Depression “as a trained and loyal army willing to sacrifice for the good of a common discipline”; by John F. Kennedy to “ask not what our country can do for us, but what we can do for our country”; by Lyndon Johnson to wage a “war on poverty.” Through these galvanizing metaphors of war and crisis, the presidency sought to fulfill its primary purpose, which is, as Walter Mondale put it in 1984, to “make us a community and keep us a community.”

As noble as this ideal may seem—as necessary as national unity may be in the face of genuine emergencies or war—progressivism’s national community has proven in political practice to be this century’s greatest disappointment. Though it has drained the strength and moral authority from local community institutions, it has failed to build the promised national substitute.

The national community’s contempt for and campaign to eradicate local civic institutions is a bedrock of 20th-century elite discourse. Local institutions, it is said, are notoriously and hopelessly backward, partial, parochial, reactionary, and riddled with irrational myths and prejudices. They cling stubbornly to obscure and retrograde notions of traditional morality and religious faith, rather than bowing sensibly to the authority of scientifically credentialed professionals and experts, who alone can exploit the potential of modernity.

How many campus-bred intellectual doctrines, how many short stories and novels, how many Hollywood movies and television shows, have reveled in this contrast between shabby, small-minded, local prejudices and a sophisticated, expansive attachment to national ideals? Given the unremitting hostility of America’s elites throughout this century, is it any wonder that local civic institutions might today find themselves in an uphill struggle for survival?

That the idea of national community has failed to deliver on its central promise—to reestablish at the level of the nation as a whole the sense of belonging, purpose, and self-governance that local institutions once provided—is now commonly considered a conservative argument. But the insight by no means originated on the right. Indeed, as Nisbet pointed out, conservatism wasted much of this century futilely extolling the virtues of rugged individualism and the untrammelled marketplace in the face of America’s manifest yearning for some form of community.

Rather, the bankruptcy of the idea of national community was the central insight of the New Left of the 1960s and of Saul Alinsky’s community organizers, before and since. They initially and correctly observed that the Great Society had not in fact delivered the great community, but rather only the cold, distant, alienated bureaucracies of “corporate liberalism.” The vast, impersonal institutions of business and government, they argued, simply could not provide the self-governance and community of “participatory democracy” for which the human spirit yearned.

Conservatism has indeed more recently taken up this general theme, though not at all in the spirit of the ’60s. To be sure, participatory democracy is essential for human happiness, conservatism maintains, but the peculiarly American way of achieving it has always been through dutiful citizenship within traditional, local institutions like the church, neighborhood, and voluntary association. That Republican presidents were swept into office throughout the past three decades on this theme proved its power; that a Democratic president recently won reelection on this same theme marks its moment of supreme triumph.

But the subtle allure of the national community idea is still very much evident today and tends to undermine even the



most sincere efforts to restore civic institutions. Our national ambivalence is nicely reflected in Hillary Rodham Clinton's recent *It Takes a Village*.

Ms. Clinton readily concedes what progressivism had denied for much of this century—that strong families, neighborhoods, and churches, far from being merely nurseries of reaction and bigotry, are essential to the physical, psychological, and moral well-being of children. That stated, however, she quickly reverts to themes more congenial to the project of national community: that such traditional local institutions have been hopelessly undercut by technology; that we therefore must now rely heavily on the advice and assistance of trained professionals and experts; and that we should consider a variety of new government institutions to ensure that all families are able to secure such advice and assistance. The small, real-life village quickly yields to the metaphorical national village.

Likewise, discussions of revitalizing civil institutions tend to focus on a limited range of major national nonprofits like the PTA or the Red Cross, which are by no means incompatible with the idea of national community. Though these organizations may have local chapters, they often look to the Washington office for marching orders, receive federal funding, press policy agendas on the federal government, and have gradually displaced the leadership of local amateurs and volunteers with centralized bureaucracies of scientifically trained experts and professionals. Such “acceptable” civic institutions can even be counted on to go before congressional committees and testify that they would languish, rather than prosper, were government's benevolent presence to be diminished any further.

It is now permissible—indeed, fashionable—to fret about the health of such organizations, because of course they do not at all undermine, but rather tend to reinforce, the upward political tug of the national community idea. It is seldom noted that perhaps their health is imperiled precisely because they have exchanged their historic roots in the neighborhood for invitations to cocktails in the salons of our political and cultural elites. Perhaps their predicament is not a proper gauge of the well-being of American civil society after all.

These examples suggest that while the moral authority of the idea of national community has been seriously eroded over the past several decades, it has nonetheless left in its wake towering bureaucracies of elites and experts—not only within government, but in the nonprofit sector as well—who have powerful vested interests in the renationalization of the idea of community. As they argue eloquently and forcefully, “civic renewal” means restoring the deference and respect owed by a mystifyingly ungrateful public to the major institutions working on behalf of the noble idea of national community.

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I would suggest, on the contrary, that it's time to look in the opposite direction, away from the exhausted ideal of national community and toward the small but vigorous civic community that Pastor Saffold is building on Milwaukee's northwest side. As Bob Woodson has argued so forcefully over the years, there are in fact hundreds of Saffolds in America's inner cities, working quietly, successfully, and without public acclaim to battle drug abuse, educate children, reclaim teens from gangs, and rebuild neighborhood economies—in other words, to accomplish as small, local civic institutions what government bureaucracies never could.

Throughout our nation faith-based grass-roots leaders are managing—at a time and in places where the bureaucracies of business and government and the mainstream nonprofits have thrown up their hands and fled—to resurrect the institutions and principles of civil society. They are civil society's trauma specialists—and the true experts on civic renewal.

Yet to our elites, these grass-roots initiatives are invisible, or if visible, dismissed as charismatic exceptions or inspiring but isolated anecdotes. After all, they're not docile subsidiaries of the larger, “acceptable” nonprofits, but rather scrappy, scruffy, fiercely independent local initiatives, too busy working with the poor to join coalitions against poverty. They are not staffed by credentialed bureaucrats, but by volunteers whose chief credential may be that they themselves have only recently overcome the daunting circumstances of the inner city. They place little faith in the rehabilitative powers of the social sciences, but witness every day the fruits of their faith in the transformative power of God.

The disdain of elites notwithstanding, we should heed the wisdom of these grass-roots leaders who have, against heavy odds, accomplished the civic revival that we wish for all our communities. We should appreciate them, honor them, celebrate them. We should also highlight the ways in which private and public resources can be redirected to those who have already accomplished so much with virtually no outside help at all. Here the federal government should have a role too—not as grand builder of national community, but as humble servant to the genuine community-builders within our neighborhoods.

When the VFW decided a while back to close its hall on Milwaukee's northwest side, no doubt that retreat of a major national nonprofit was carefully toted up as one more loss on Professor Putnam's gloomy balance sheet of civil society. When Gerald Saffold once again filled the old hall with joyous music, no doubt that vigorous advance of civic renewal went unrecorded. It is past time to direct our gaze away from the failed project of national community and focus once again on the churches, voluntary associations, and grass-roots groups that are rebuilding America's civil society one family, one block, one neighborhood at a time. ■

AMERICA'S

CIVIC

BY WILLIAM A. GALSTON & PETER LEVINE

The publication of Robert Putnam's "Bowling Alone" in 1995 sparked a vigorous but often murky debate about America's civic condition. Some of the confusion arose from the inconclusiveness of the available data and some from a failure to draw certain basic distinctions.

It is not always recognized that civic health may be measured along several dimensions: participation in electoral politics, political and social trust, voluntary sector activity, and attitudes and conduct bearing on the moral condition of society, to name but a few. No one doubts that many forms of participation in official political institutions and activities have declined in recent decades or that Americans are less inclined to express trust in political leaders—and in one another. It is equally clear that in overwhelming numbers, Americans believe that their society is morally weaker than it once was. Whether they are right to believe this is a different, and more difficult, question. But the fact that they do has contributed to the surprising public salience of what might have remained an abstruse scholarly debate.

When we turn our attention to the voluntary sector, matters become less clear. Here again, some basic distinctions prove useful. Voluntary sector activities include formal organizational membership, volunteering, charitable giving, and informal socializing. Evidence suggests that trends in these areas may be diverging. Moreover, civic trends have not been linear during the past generation. Some declines that began in the 1970s—in aggregate group membership, volunteering, and philanthropy—appear to have halted and even reversed themselves in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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CONDITION

A Glance at the Evidence

GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Judged against other industrialized nations, American civil society remains comparatively strong (though its relative standing may have fallen in recent decades). According to the 1990–91 World Values Survey, 82 percent of Americans belong to at least one voluntary association, a rate exceeded only in Iceland, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Furthermore, Americans belong to (and volunteer for) almost all types of groups at above-average rates. Only unions are relatively weak in the United States.

Existing methods for determining and comparing rates of group membership are far from perfect. For example, surveys have not typically asked people *how many* associations they belong to. Instead, they have asked whether people belong to various *types* of groups, and answers to these questions have been aggregated to produce a total number of memberships. This aggregate figure is misleading because anyone may belong to several groups of a particular type. Over time, Americans' memberships may have concentrated within certain categories, creating an illusion of decline.

Critics have identified two additional problems with established survey instruments. First, they point out that since strictly comparable poll questions have been asked only since the 1970s, it is hard to know whether aggregate group membership has declined since earlier decades. Second, they argue that existing surveys are unlikely to have captured all recent changes in U.S. associational life—for example, the proliferation of faith-based informal “small groups” that Robert Wuthnow has so painstakingly documented.

Still, there is no evidence that the average rate of membership has *increased* in the last quarter century. This is a surprise, because in the past rising levels of education have been linked with increased associational activity. It appears that two trends over the past quarter century have roughly counterbalanced each other: the proportion of high school and college graduates in the population has grown larger, but civic participation at every educational level has declined. People with high school diplomas but no college education have become about 32 percent less likely to join any associations, while there has been an increase in the proportion of people who belong to no organizations at all.

Trends among racial and ethnic groups reflect their distinctive history and condition. To take just one example, African Americans have traditionally combined formal political acts, such as registering people to vote, with group membership and protest tactics. Overall, there has been little decline in these forms of civic engagement since the “activist” 1960s, but

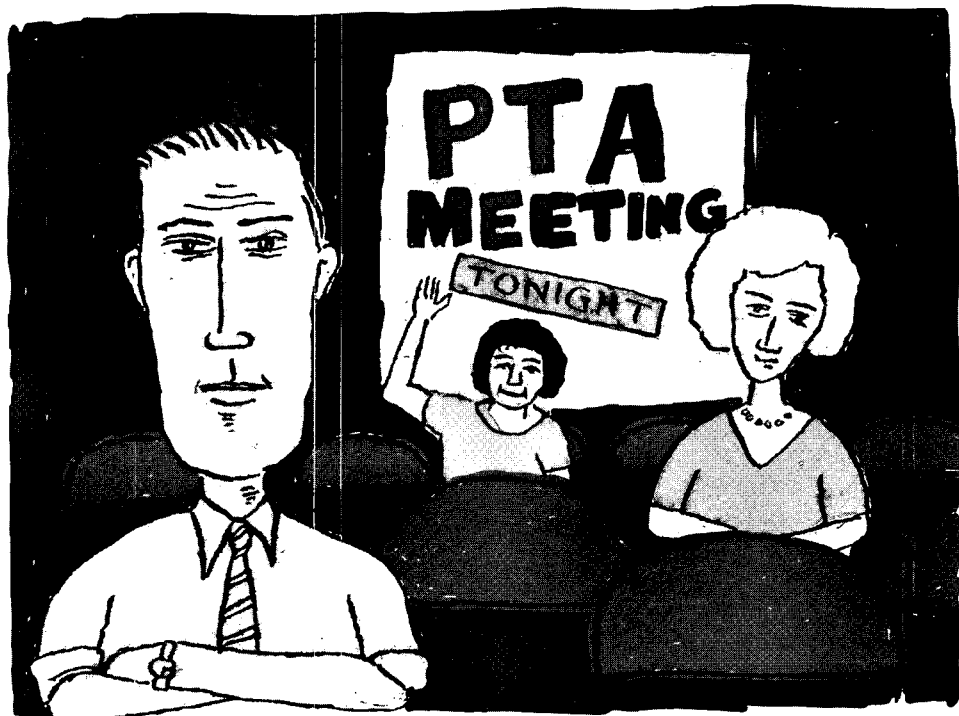


ILLUSTRATION BY GLENN PIERCE

African Americans *have* typically shifted their attention from civil rights struggles to quality-of-life issues in local communities. And as Fredrick C. Harris has noted, African Americans without much formal education have, like their white counterparts, largely dropped out of community-oriented activities as well as formal political life.

Another way to break down aggregate measures of civil society is to look at types of organizations. Most categories have seen little change since 1972, when the General Social Survey first asked relevant poll questions. For instance, religious associations, sports leagues, and youth organizations have had stable membership levels. However, millions of people have left labor unions and fraternal societies such as the Elks and Masons, and similar numbers have joined professional associations. Membership in school service groups has substantially increased, perhaps because of recent efforts to link community service and learning. Finally, as Everett C. Ladd has pointed out, there has been a huge shift from mainline Protestant denominations to evangelical churches.

NOT ALL GROUPS ARE CREATED EQUAL

These changes may prove significant for the future of democracy in America. Throughout American history, voluntary associations have been valued because they are thought to build civic virtue, foster trust, encourage cooperation, and promote political participation. But on closer inspection, it turns out that not all associations promote democratic health in the same way or to the same extent.

- **Unions**, for instance, are important sources of solidarity among working people. They have core functions that attract members, but they also offer social activities, information, and

mutual assistance. They also offer a measure of political power to workers, thereby increasing pluralism and encouraging participation. Members of union households are 8 percent more likely than other people to vote. Though John Brehm and Wendy Rahn have found that union membership is a relatively weak predictor of overall associational membership, Eric Uslaner's research shows that unionized workers join more voluntary organizations and make more charitable contributions than other people do. The dramatic decline in union membership over the past 40 years has been exacerbated by factors—automation, international competition, the relocation of factories to nonunion states, and changes in federal labor law enforcement—that do not directly affect other associations.

• **Fraternal organizations and women's auxiliaries** have suffered deep losses in membership since 1974. As Theda Skocpol has demonstrated, these groups traditionally had deep roots in their communities, and they offered men and women of different classes an opportunity to talk and cooperate more or less as equals—something that professional associations, which have grown in recent decades, do not do. The important question is what (if anything) will replace the cross-class local organizations that flourished through most of American history.

• **Church-affiliated groups** are the backbone of civil society in America, involving almost half the population (compared with just 13 percent in the average industrialized democracy). Religious associations offer ways for people to give money, receive aid, hold meetings, recruit members for other associations, and learn about public issues. As Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady have found, they are especially valuable for people with little income or education, who tend not to join other groups. Polls show that membership in such groups correlates with voting, volunteering, charity, and political activity.

• **Evangelical denominations** are no exception. The experience, values, and personal networks that they develop transfer easily to politics. They have little hierarchy, and they demand intense participation from their members. For example, as part of their church activities, Baptists are much more likely to plan meetings and make presentations than are Catholics. The growth of evangelical denominations has introduced many people, especially lower-income people, to the political process and given them powerful tools for mutual aid.

Even as fundamentalist denominations encourage the faithful to rely on one another, however, there is evidence that they promote distrust of outsiders. This practice, ironically, helps voter turnout, because a fervent dislike for others motivates people to vote. The broader point, however, is that increased mutual reliance and trust within groups is not necessarily correlated with increased trust among groups.

• **Mailing-list associations**, from the National Rifle Association to the Children's Defense Fund, have grown since 1970. Members of these groups contribute dues to support professional staff; but they do not donate much time or effort. Presumably, writing a check improves one's skills, knowledge, and interpersonal trust much less than attending a meeting or organizing a grass-roots movement.

But mailing-list organizations must not be stereotyped. The Sierra Club, for instance, has been described as a group whose members merely write checks and read newsletters. But as George Pettinico has noted, in one May weekend, the Los Angeles chapter alone organized 39 events, from classes to camping excursions, that were cooperative and participatory.

The controversy over contemporary national check-writing organizations raises broader historical and political issues about the relationship between top-down and bottom-up activities. Theda Skocpol argues that classic voluntary associations such as the PTA and the American Legion succeeded in creating both effective national lobbying arms and vital chapters or affiliates at the state and local levels, with close communication between the various tiers. It should also be said that even pure mailing-list organizations can be effective political actors, thereby freeing members to perform other civic tasks.

Still, a large shift from grass-roots groups to national membership organizations would be grounds for concern. In general, today's associations offer relatively few opportunities for local leadership and deliberation. The past 25 years have seen a marked decline in the share of people who belong to committees and serve as officers of local groups, a trend that parallels declines in such forms of local political activity as attending school board meetings and participating in political parties.

ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE AND HEALTHY DEMOCRACY
Recent scholarship suggests complex links between associational activities and key political variables such as political participation, social trust, and confidence in government.

Controlling for education and income, members of

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church groups, neighborhood associations, and sports leagues are especially likely to follow politics and vote—a correlation that supports the hypothesis that political participation is significantly more attractive for individuals who belong to social networks. It's not hard to see why. Making a meaningful decision at the polls requires a big investment of time and attention. Because members of voluntary groups have many opportunities to discuss politics, they can easily acquire information, and they are sometimes persuaded to vote by each other or by local politicians and activists who gravitate to organizations. By urging fellow members to support particular candidates or causes, citizens can multiply their political power.

Most studies find that associational membership is also linked to trust in other people. But researchers differ on the strength of the relationship and on the direction of the causal arrow between the two. A recent poll of Philadelphians by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press showed no strong direct link between trust and participation in voluntary activities. However, Philadelphians who believed that they could “make a difference” tended to be trusting; they were also especially likely to volunteer.

Interpersonal trust and confidence in government tend to go together. Some research suggests that disenchantment with official institutions is an important cause of wariness toward other people. When political leaders let us down, we draw negative conclusions about human nature in general. The reverse is presumably true as well: wariness toward other people (stemming from crime, family dysfunction, and other sources) may affect our confidence in politicians.

Yet trust in government has fallen more precipitously than interpersonal trust. Much of the decline took place in 1963–75, an era defined largely by Vietnam and Watergate. And perhaps, to a significant extent, the decline was justified. But there now exists, at least at the extremes, evidence of paranoia rather than healthy distrust. According to a recent study by the University of Virginia's Post-Modernity Project, a fifth of Americans believe that the governing elite is “involved in a conspiracy.” Widespread fear of major public institutions not only creates generalized distrust—thereby discouraging group membership—but may also cause people to favor exclusive and inward-looking organizations. As noted by Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks, excessive cynicism about politics and government may well discourage voting and other forms of political participation. A presumption that politicians are unworthy keeps many honorable people out of the field. And a belief in conspiracies prevents citizens from making critical distinctions among leaders, organizations, and ideologies.

A REFUGE FROM POLITICS?

The evidence now available does not permit firm conclusions about the overall condition of associational life in America. But it does seem that voluntary activities are on balance healthier than are formal political institutions and

processes. Indeed, citizens, particularly the youngest, seem to be shifting their preferred civic involvement from official politics to the voluntary sector. If so, the classic Tocquevillian thesis would have to be modified: local civic life, far from acting as a school for wider political involvement, may increasingly serve as a refuge from (and alternative to) it. The consequences for the future of our democracy could be significant. ■

For Further Reading

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Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

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In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a group of black inner-city ministers in Boston organized themselves around a plan for cutting juvenile violence, reclaiming parks and sidewalks, educating at-risk children, promoting local economic development, strengthening families, and resurrecting the civil life of their jobless drug-and-crime-infested neighborhoods. The plan, which included everything from summer recreation and literacy training programs to faith-based one-on-one drug treatment and neighborhood patrols, was not hatched by academic experts, funded by major foundations, praised by leading pundits, or guided by government agencies. Rather, it was based on what the ministers and their small but dedicated cadre of young adult volunteers had learned up close and personal after years spent living, working, and walking—every day—among the poorest of the urban poor and their children.

THE WORD'S WORK

THE CHURCH AND THE “CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR”

BY JOHN J. DIULIO, JR.



STEPHEN SHAMES/MATRIX

John J. DiIulio, Jr., Douglas Dillon Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution and professor of politics and public affairs at Princeton University, directs the Partnership for Research on Religion and At-Risk Youth (PRRAY) in Philadelphia, which provides technical assistance and financial support to inner-city youth outreach ministries.

GOOD NEWS

In fact, the effort was forged from what the clergy and church volunteers had learned from the local drug kingpins whom they were struggling to save from addiction, violence, jail, death—and damnation. Reverend Eugene F. Rivers, III, the Pentecostal minister of the Azusa Christian Community church who spearheaded the effort and whose own humble inner-city row house was twice sprayed with bullets, recalls one searing insight:

“Nearing exhaustion, we asked this one major local dealer, ‘Man, why did we lose you? Why are we losing other kids now?’ He stares us in the eye and says, ‘I’m there, you’re not. When the kids go to school, I’m there, you’re not. When the boy goes for a loaf of bread or wants a pair of sneakers or just somebody older to talk to or feel safe and strong around, I’m there, you’re not. I’m there, you’re not; I win, you lose.’”

Helped from the start by Boston’s Catholic Church and several local synagogues, the black inner-city ministers’ community-saving effort won wider support in 1992 after a group of gang members burst in on the funeral service of a boy killed in a drive-by shooting and stabbed another child in front of the shocked congregation. In the words of the Reverend Jeffrey Brown, a Baptist pastor who has worked closely with Rivers, “That horrible event was the proverbial wake-up call, not only to other local churches and people of the faith, but to the political and other powers that be.”

Soon the local press and lots of state and local politicians began to acknowledge the ministers’ work. In turn, local police and probation officials who had been highly dubious of partnering with the preachers started working hand-in-hand with the clergy on a wide variety of anti-gang policing, juvenile probation monitoring, and crime prevention initiatives.

One much-publicized result: Boston has not had a gun-related youth homicide since July 1995, and everyone from the city’s mayor to its in-the-trenches probation officers acknowledges that it could not and would not have happened without Rivers, Brown, and the other clergy and church volunteers. “With the churches,” one veteran Boston police officer recently told a group of Philadelphia clergy, “with cooperation, we can turn our neighborhoods around. Without them, without cooperation, we can’t.”

BEYOND BOSTON

Rivers and Brown, together with Reverend Kevin Cosby of Louisville, Kentucky, and Reverend Harold Dean Trulear of Philadelphia, have formed a national “leadership foundation” that seeks to bolster ongoing faith-based inner-city youth and community development activities and mobilize at least 1,000 inner-city churches around a Boston-style effort in the 40 most blighted neighborhoods of the nation’s 25 largest cities, all by the year 2006. In May, the Institute for Civil Society, a new New England-based philanthropy, gave the effort a three-year \$750,000 seed grant. “In Louisville,” says Cosby, “we’ve held organizing meetings and had 2,500 people show up, ready to go.” Likewise, reports Trulear, “more than a thousand churches in metropolitan New York alone are doing some type of youth and community outreach ministry, and several new and revitalized networks of churches are doing the same in metropolitan Philadelphia.”

“Everybody celebrates the success and says ‘amen,’ but most people, especially most educated people, remain deeply conflicted about working on social and economic problems with and through churches.”

Already, Rivers and Brown have taken part in what appear to be promising initial mobilization efforts in over a half-dozen cities from Chicago to Tampa. Meanwhile, over the past year or so, their efforts have attracted favorable interest from national journalists, corporate leaders, politicians, academics, and others, including influential Boston area individuals and institutions that, as Rivers and Brown emphasize to the clergy who are beginning to organize in other cities, “didn’t want to be connected with the churches, didn’t ‘do God,’ didn’t return our phone calls, and literally wouldn’t give us the time of day a few years ago even though we were in their own inner-city backyards.”



CIVIL SOCIETY

That's the good news. Now, however, for the bad—or, more precisely, the complicating—news, first with respect to the Boston story and next with respect to the overarching reality that not even an army of well-led, well-supported churches and faith-based programs could save the nation's most severely at-risk children, revitalize blighted neighborhoods, and resurrect the civil society of inner-city America without the active human and financial support of suburban churches, secular civil institutions, profit-making corporations, and, last but not least, government at all levels.

Back to Boston. For all the attention, praise, and publicity, Rivers, Brown, and the local church volunteers there are still wanting for new volunteers and still lacking in financial support. Explains Eva Thorne, a Ph.D. candidate in political science at M.I.T. who, together with other young black professionals, has worked with the Boston ministers for nearly a

decade and who is preparing a church-anchored, multi-million dollar redevelopment plan for Dorchester:

"Everybody celebrates the success and says 'amen,' but most people, especially most educated people, remain deeply conflicted about working on social and economic problems with and through churches. For some, it's an underlying suspicion that church-folks are stupid, and a more generalized hostility to religion and all things religious. For others, it's more a church-state thing, which mediates their thinking even where government isn't at issue in what we're trying to do. For many, it's even deeper than that. You know, 'I'm not going out there with those drug addicts and violent kids! I'm not getting sweaty and giving up my free time. And I'm not giving money or other help to anyone who's fool enough to do it.' So there are those who are weirded out by your walk-among-the-poor religious motivation, those for whom it's too real and too



STEPHEN SHAWES/MATRIX

strong. But, then, blocking you on the opposite side are those who think your religious motivation is, in effect, too weak or false, the 'all inner-city preachers are pimps with collars' school. It's very frustrating."

As Rivers, Brown, and their street-smart minions reflect on the "24-7-365, fall asleep in our clothes" efforts it took to get a faith-friendly handle on local youth gangs and reduce juvenile gunplay in their neighborhoods, they feel daunted by the prospect of a dramatic increase in poor, young, fatherless, jobless black males. Local researchers project that the number of black male residents of the city between the ages of 14 and 24 will grow to over 30,000 by 2005, roughly a threefold increase over the number residing there in 1995. "Many of these children," warns Rivers, "are the 4- to 14-year-olds running around at night on our streets without any adult care or guidance. We're trying to reach their mothers, reconnect them with fathers or father figures, and take them on in a holistic way. But their social force is growing at least as fast as ours, coming up as they are the first children born in the wake of the crack cocaine crisis and the welfare cutoffs."

In response, the ministers are redoubling their work on an ambitious pilot project, called "Operation 2006," that seeks to involve clergy and church volunteers in the lives of every one of the city's most severely at-risk youngsters, providing counseling and community service employment for their parents or legal guardians, and offering the children everything from after-school safe havens and decent meals to adult-supervised recreation programs and community-based juvenile probation ombudsmen. "We hope churches in Philadelphia and other cities," remarks Trulear, "will work to do the same, but our churches cannot even begin to do it alone."

No, they can't.

FAITH FACTORS

It's true that most of the best recent empirical research suggests that inner-city churches, especially black congregations, are leveraging several times their weight in community service. For example, a 1990 study of more than 2,100 urban black congregations found that about 70 percent sponsored or participated directly in community outreach activities—staffing day-care facilities, offering substance-abuse prevention programs, administering food banks, building shelters, and more. A 1994 compendium of research on the subject referenced scores of studies showing that most urban black churches are involved in community efforts ranging from housing and health services to preschools and elementary education.

Eighty-five percent of black churches in Atlanta, according to one study, are engaged in some type of outreach program beyond religious services to their congregations. And a forthcoming, in-depth, multi-city survey commissioned by Partners

for Sacred Places, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit interested mainly in the historic preservation of older urban churches, synagogues, and temples, will provide the most conclusive evidence yet that big-city churches anchor an incredible array of youth and community development efforts—efforts that would cost literally tens of millions to provide at public expense.

But as economists Linda Loury and Glenn Loury recently intimated in these pages, we remain a long way from a definitive body of research evidence on the actual extent and the efficacy of church-anchored and faith-based social programs.

Most of the preliminary evidence is indeed encouraging, including studies showing that churched young black urban males have brighter life prospects (lower rates of crime, drugs, and joblessness) than otherwise comparable unchurched youth; that faith-based programs in prisons have measurable rehabilitative effects; and more.

Still, the "faith factor" literature remains in its infancy, and, even with the recent surge of interest in the topic among leading social scientists and policy analysts, it will be some time before we can identify the conditions, if any, under which

More Americans may now be bowling alone, but scores of millions of them are still praying together and volunteering through their churches. Churches are the country's single biggest

source of volunteers, way ahead of workplaces, schools or colleges, fraternal groups, and other civil institutions.



given types of church-centered programs work, or specify how, if at all, faith-based efforts can be taken to scale in ways that cut crime, reduce poverty, banish illiteracy, or yield other positive, predictable, and desirable social consequences.

CHURCH ANCHORS

As this research goes forward and as ministers like Rivers rally support to their noble cause, it will be crucial for all concerned to understand inner-city churches as part of what Lester Salamon terms "the civil society sector."

In the January/February issue of *Society*, Salamon challenged the conventional view of civil society as a diverse set of

nonmarket, nongovernmental institutions—"savings associations, church choirs, sports clubs, charities, and philanthropic foundations"—whose unique mission is to create "networks of civic engagement that produce and enforce communal values and notions of trust so necessary for cooperation and civil life." This view, he argued, "overlooks the extent to which the 'civil society sector' relies on other sectors to survive."

Drawing an impressive array of data on the civil society sector in the United States and other democracies, Salamon puts a huge empirical question mark over the idea that as "the state expands, it therefore renders voluntary organizations functionally irrelevant, thereby contributing to the decline and undermining the spirit of community which they sustain." Instead of the "zero sum, conflictual image of the relationship between the civil society sector and the state," the data he examined painted a more complicated picture of "three more or less distinct sectors—government, business, and nonprofit—that nevertheless find ways to work together in responding to public needs." So conceived, he reasoned, "the term 'civil society' would not apply to a particular sector, but to a relationship among the sectors, one in which a high level of cooperation and mutual support prevailed."

Some conservative champions of faith-based efforts seem to suppose that it is only liberal welfare state apologists and spokespersons for big, largely government-funded religious charities who are cautioning that churches and other civil institutions cannot fill the financial and social services gaps left by government withdrawal from low-income cash and in-kind assistance for the poor. They're as wrong as they are wrong-headed.

As former Secretary of Education William J. Bennett and Senator Daniel Coats (R-IN) argued publicly in 1995, "the retreat of government does not always, at least not immediately, result in the rebirth of civil society." Or, in Rivers's words, "Without public support and back-up, financial and logistical, there's no way churches or other community folk can turn the tide. But if we learn how to work together, then there's no limit to what can be accomplished before it's too late."

SPIRITUAL CAPITAL

Amen. It is also important to think critically about faith communities in relation to broader debates about the state of civil society and to ask how much of urban America's ostensibly dwindling stock of social capital is, as it were, "spiritual capital."

In several articles published in the mid-1990s, beginning with the much-noted "Bowling Alone," political scientist Robert Putnam highlighted evidence of "a broad and continuing erosion of civic engagement that began a quarter century ago." Fewer and fewer Americans, he argued, were voting, joining the PTA, going to church, or participating in other civic associations and group activities.

Putnam's thesis about the decline of social capital has been criticized on many different grounds, and the scholarly scrap over civil society is far from over. One thing, however, is

indisputable. While more Americans are now bowling alone, scores of millions of Americans are still praying together and volunteering through their churches.

Outstanding survey research produced by George Gallup, Jr., plainly documents that most Americans believe in God, belong to a church or synagogue, and acknowledge that religion is very important in their lives. Moreover, more than 60 percent of all Americans, and more than 80 percent of black Americans, believe that religion can answer all or most social problems.

Churches are the country's single biggest source of volunteers, way ahead of workplaces, schools or colleges, fraternal groups, and other civil institutions. As Gallup has summarized the evidence, "Churches and other religious bodies are the major supporters of voluntary services for neighborhoods and communities. Members of a church or synagogue...tend to be much more involved in charitable activity, particularly through organized groups, than nonmembers. Almost half of the church members did unpaid volunteer work in a given year, compared to only a third of nonmembers."

CHARITABLE CHOICE

Finally, it is vital to remain focused on how church-led volunteers and the rest of the civil society sector respond to today's ever more highly devolved federal welfare regime.

Section 104 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (a.k.a. the welfare law) encourages states to engage faith-based organizations as providers of welfare services funded by Washington—job search programs, maternity homes for expectant unmarried minors, drug-treatment programs, and much more. Under this so-called charitable choice provision, religious providers that accept government funds have the right to maintain their religious character—displaying religious art, using religious criteria in personnel decisions, and limiting the range of government audits by placing federal funds into separate budgets.

At this point, it remains unclear how, whether, or to what extent churches will take advantage of the charitable choice provision, and, if so, with what consequences. In fact, we may never know. Even before the welfare law was enacted, scores of national and state research projects were planned to monitor the impact of welfare devolution. But almost no attention is being paid to the implementation of the charitable choice provision.

In a 1995 lecture, Nobel economist Robert W. Fogel argued that the United States is now in the midst of a "Fourth Great Awakening," a "new religious revival fueled by a revolution with the corruptions of contemporary society," and effecting a "political realignment" evidenced by the legislative handiwork of the Republican-led 104th Congress.

A most sweeping and provocative big-think thesis, but one best pondered by preachers, politicians, pundits, public administrators, and policy analysts who first take care to see whether anyone greatly awakens to charitable choice, and, if so, how and with what results. ■



GIVE COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS A FIGHTING CHANCE

BY
BRUCE
KATZ

Over the past several decades, American cities have witnessed an explosive growth in the capacity and expertise of community development corporations, church- and community-based organizations, and community lending institutions. These groups—the front lines of the national discussion over “civil society,” “community empowerment,” and “social capital”—have made discernible progress in some of the most distressed communities in the country. They have

produced and financed affordable homes and, to a lesser extent, invested in commercial enterprises and engaged in anti-crime, child care, job training, health care, and other activities.

Most remarkably, this progress has been made in the face of powerful economic and demographic forces—the rise in concentrated urban poverty and the ongoing exodus of middle-class families and low-skilled jobs to the metropolitan outskirts—that have destabilized the cities and neighborhoods in which community institutions operate. Left

unchecked, these forces can eviscerate the contributions of community-based groups.

The larger trends shaping America's inner-city neighborhoods are not, contrary to conventional wisdom, the exclusive work of invisible market and consumer forces. They are also the result of government subsidies and policies. To

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ensure the continued success of community-based development groups, federal policies and private sector actors must do more than seed, reward, and enhance their efforts. They must help shape an economic context in which those efforts can succeed.

The Rise in Concentrated Urban Poverty

America's most disturbing demographic trend—rarely discussed during the welfare debate—has been the explosive growth in concentrated poverty, particularly minority poverty, in urban communities. According to the Clinton administration's 1997 "State of the Cities" report, the poverty rate in cities rose almost 50 percent, from 14.2 percent in 1970 to 20.6 percent in 1995.

Trends in inner-city neighborhoods have been even worse. According to Harvard's Paul Jargowsky, the number of people living in high-poverty neighborhoods just about doubled between 1970 and 1990. Some 8 million people, nearly a third of them children, now live in neighborhoods where more than 40 percent of residents are poor.

These neighborhoods are especially likely to house minorities. Between 1970 and 1990, the number of African Americans living in high-poverty areas climbed from 2.4 million to 4.2 million. An incredible one-third of all African-American poor now live in such communities. Three out of four poor African Americans live in neighborhoods where more than 20 percent of the population is below the poverty line.

"The residential concentration of poverty," contends Minnesota State Representative Myron Orfield, "creates social repercussions far greater than the sum of its parts. Physical separation from jobs and middle-class role models...reinforces social isolation and weakens work skills. Poor individuals who live in concentrated poverty are far more likely to become pregnant as teenagers, to drop out of high school, and to remain jobless than their counterparts in socioeconomically mixed neighborhoods."

Neighborhoods with strong community development organizations have not escaped the growth in concentrated

poverty. As David Rusk shows in his new book, *Up the Down Escalator*, average poverty rates increased from 23 percent to 25 percent in areas served by a sample group of "new" community development corporations (formed in the 1970s) and from 19 percent to 28 percent in areas served by a sample group of "old" CDCs (formed in the 1960s). Neighborhoods grew poorer not because low-income families moved in, but because so many middle-class households moved out.

The Changing Nature of Metropolitan Economies

In many respects the flip side of the rise in concentrated urban poverty is the surge in suburban and exurban sprawl. Metropolitan areas countrywide are seeing similar patterns of development—explosive sprawl where farmland and open space once reigned, matched by decline and abandonment in the central cities and older suburbs.

Between 1970 and 1990, for example, the population of the Chicago metropolitan area increased only 4 percent, but the land in the region used for urban purposes grew 35 percent. More than 450 square miles, twice the size of the city of Chicago, were converted from agricultural to urban use.

Even metropolitan areas that lost people gained land. The population of greater Pittsburgh fell 9 percent during 1970–90, but the land used for urban purposes grew 30 percent. Some 180 square miles of prime farmland in western Pennsylvania switched to urban use.

The exponential growth of suburban and exurban areas has two huge implications for community organizations working in urban neighborhoods. First, the suburbs are the principal job generators in the new economy. "In the early 1990s," according to the "State of the Cities" report, "87 percent of the new jobs in the lower paying and lower skilled service and retail trade sectors were created in the suburbs." Not surprisingly, jobless rates in central cities are generally one-third to one-half higher than those in nearby suburbs. Second, cities continue to lose middle-class families. Though only 11 of the 30 largest cities in 1970

have grown in the intervening years, all have seen heavy growth in the share of their population with low incomes.

The Push and Pull of Government Policies

Federal, state, and local government policies have all contributed to the growing spatial isolation of minority poverty that poses such a challenge to community-based institutions.

Government housing policies are a prime example. Until recently, the rules governing admission to public and assisted housing allowed the poorest households to jump to the top of the waiting lists. The result should have been predictable: the average income in public housing plummeted—from 33 percent of area median in 1980 to 17 percent (\$6,500 for the average family) in 1994. Other rules made it hard for public housing agencies to tear down obsolete projects, even when it cost less to replace than to rehabilitate them. In many central cities, public housing became the locus of concentrated poverty in unsafe, indecent, and unsanitary conditions—the very opposite of what was intended.

Even the federal voucher program has fallen short of its goal of giving low-income families maximum choice in the private rental market. Most public housing agencies (which have a monopoly over voucher administration) treat vouchers as a "stepchild" program, rarely performing the landlord outreach or recipient counseling that spells success. In many metropolitan areas, as many as 10–15 public housing agencies pose bureaucratic obstacles to residents wishing to escape high-poverty areas. Suburban jurisdictions have erected their own barriers to mobility by favoring very low density settlements with little affordable rental housing. And racial hostility and discrimination, overt and covert, continue apace, as HUD found with suburban and congressional reaction to its Moving to Opportunity initiative. As the Urban Institute's Marge Turner has shown, despite housing vouchers' mobility potential, in some jurisdictions recipients are heavily concentrated in areas of high poverty.



Federal and state policies also continue to encourage exurban expansion—and with it the exodus of jobs and middle-class families from central cities and older suburbs. Among such policies are federal and state spending on transportation, water, sewer, and other infrastructure; federal tax subsidies for home ownership; state land use laws; state incentives to major employers to relocate and expand to “greenfields” far outside central cities and older suburbs; federal rules that prohibit or impede reinvestment in central city neighborhoods with high minority concentrations; federal decisions on the location of government facilities and the procurement of government services; and federal laws and regulations regarding the environment, telecommunications, and utilities.

In short, despite often remarkable achievements, it is clear that community institutions will never realize their full potential unless and until the federal and state governments revamp policies that undermine community action.

Restructure Federal Housing Policies

Washington has already begun to overhaul problematic housing policies. In fact, the Clinton administration has embarked on the most ambitious reform of public housing since the program’s inception in the 1930s. In an effort that will change the physical face of public housing, the administration

plans to demolish some 100,000 public housing units—about one-twelfth of the entire public housing stock—by the year 2000. Creative replacement efforts are under way in dozens of cities, with heavy emphasis on smaller-scale, economically integrated affordable housing developments.

The reforms will also alter the human face of public housing. At the administration’s behest, Congress has temporarily repealed the rules favoring the poorest households. Public housing agencies are being encouraged to create “mixed income” developments through admission policies that include working families as well as efforts to help existing residents increase their own incomes.

The same reformist impulses are needed in the housing voucher program if it is to succeed in giving low-income residents the choice to live where they want. Governance of the program—which now resides in 3,400 bureaucracies operating in parochial jurisdictions—must be shifted to the metropolitan level, as has been done, at least partially, for transportation and the environment. Such a shift would generate savings for the cash-strapped federal government by ending the wasteful duplication of administrative overhead. But even more important, it would move more lower-income residents into housing of their choice by requiring metropolitan administrators to provide counseling to potential recipients, outreach aggressively to

capable landlords, and work with suburban churches and other groups to help place willing residents. Public housing agencies (or consortia of such agencies) should be allowed to compete for administrative responsibilities along with regional nonprofit organizations.

Reform Federal Infrastructure Policies

In regions across the country, the costs of unfettered sprawl are bringing together diverse coalitions of central city and older suburban elected officials, downtown business leaders, environmentalists, farmland preservation advocates, and civic, religious, and community groups. These coalitions are forcing state and metropolitan consideration of an eclectic mix of solutions—labor mobility, residential mobility, regional tax equity and stability, land use reform, and targeted investment of government subsidies.

Minnesota, for example, has upgraded metropolitan governance in the Twin Cities area and has enacted laws to spread the cost of poverty through the Twin Cities region. Maryland has recently enacted Governor Glendening’s “smart growth” legislative package, which steers billions of state road, sewer, and school monies away from farms and open spaces to existing areas targeted for concentrated growth. Colorado, Delaware, and other states are now considering versions of smart growth to curb sprawl in their own backyards.

skills are, what the barriers to employment are, and which training programs or schools best link them to employers."

Some community development organizations are already expanding their focus to include workforce development and access to employment. Indianapolis, for example, is contracting with community development corporations to help move welfare recipients to jobs. The federal government can help replicate these successful efforts through reforms in employment training laws as well as additional resources for community-based welfare-to-work efforts. Community groups can also expand their ties with corporate benefactors to include workforce connections.

Only the Beginning

Community institutions are an essential building block of national urban and metropolitan policy. Yet their work is being consistently undermined by a series of government policies that push jobs and middle-class people out of central cities, leaving only the very poor behind.

Government efforts must do more, therefore, than directly support the activities of community institutions; that is community policy on the cheap. Government must help create the urban economic climate in which community-based efforts can succeed.

Although the brief checklist of reforms I have noted in government housing and infrastructure would help ease the concentration of urban poverty, spur reinvestment in older established communities, and connect low-income urban residents to jobs in the metropolitan economy, that checklist is hardly complete. As Michael Porter, of the Harvard Business School, has persuasively argued, low-income urban neighborhoods have their own competitive market advantages that must be understood and exploited. Educational reform, land use reform, public safety efforts, and home ownership initiatives also demand serious attention and action. Nevertheless, the checklist presents a useful and necessary starting point for a community policy that can match the heady rhetoric of our national debates with the harsh reality of our urban streets. ■



Washington should be a partner, not just an observer, in these efforts. It should enhance moves toward state and metropolitan solutions that curb sprawl, promote smart growth, rebuild established communities, and redress inequities between rich and poor political jurisdictions. This year, for example, Congress should do three simple things to improve federal transportation law—the most strategic point for intervention.

First, Congress should preserve and strengthen, not scale back, the existing metropolitan role in transportation planning and spending. Metropolitan areas are where transportation, land use, economic development, and environmental issues come together in practical ways.

Second, Congress should strengthen the role of citizens and communities in transportation decisions. It should require state and metropolitan transportation entities to disclose their spending patterns by political jurisdiction, use computer mapping tools to illustrate the disparate patterns, and make such information widely available. Such "right to know" laws already govern housing, banking, and the environment.

Finally, Congress should reward states and regions that make smart growth a central part of their transportation mission. It could provide regulatory relief or supplemental funding, or it could make direct grants to state and metropolitan entities to integrate transportation and land use planning.

Regional Strategies for CDCs

Change cannot be limited, however, to government policies. Community-based groups themselves must expand their horizons and build on their affordable housing successes.

First, community institutions need to place their neighborhood strategies in a regional context, understanding how government policies interact with the larger economy and engaging, where appropriate, on metropolitan issues and decisionmaking. As California scholars Manual Pastor, Peter Dreier, and Gene Grigsby have recently noted, "Most community development groups have tended to favor a neighborhood focus because it fits their size, administrative capacity, and political base. The new challenges of persistent poverty, economic restructuring, and demographic transition," they note, "now require that communities reach out to a regional level of decisionmaking—and CDCs are probably the best placed vehicle in terms of expertise and credibility to lead this shift in policy paradigms."

Community institutions also need to help connect residents of their distressed neighborhoods to jobs in the metropolitan area. As Jeremy Nowak of the Delaware Valley Community Investment Fund has written, community groups must "shift their view of the neighborhoods they work in, seeing them primarily not as real estate and social service markets, but as labor markets." They need to learn "where people work, what their

The 21st century has already begun with a radical new welfare system that fundamentally changes how America cares for her poor, dependent, jobless, and abused. The 1996 welfare reform law was the result of a decade of often dramatic and contentious debate about the proper nature of reform. On the one side were conservative reformers who demanded work requirements, illegitimacy prevention, and general de-entitlement. On the other were liberal reformers who also had an interest in work requirements and better job placement but wanted to see the essential characteristics of the social safety net remain intact.

BY DAVID KUO

The heat of the last debate was often painfully intense, but perhaps the lull before the next welfare debate begins will afford both camps of reformers the opportunity to learn from each other—especially when it comes to the hard work of recreating civil society and a private sector approach to caring for those individuals in need.

Liberals first. Faith matters. Ironically for a liberal welfare tradition that had its roots in religious revival, many of today's liberals acknowledge that religious faith is certainly a matter of importance, while ignoring—or being actively hostile to—its policy potential as a catalyst for radical change in people's lives.

During the last welfare debate, for instance, Senator John Ashcroft's "charitable choice" provision to allow states to contract with private and religious charitable organizations using federal funds was broadly attacked by many on the left. Yet its basic purpose was simply to level the playing field for faith-based not-for-profits.

POVERTY

LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES

WHAT



RICK FALCO/BLACK STAR

Overwhelming evidence coming from groups as diverse as the Heritage Foundation and Public/Private Ventures suggests that faith is not only important, it may be *the* factor in determining whether an at-risk child, a welfare mother, or a convicted criminal is able to turn his or her life around. It is vital that political liberals embrace this idea. The next year will give them opportunities to do so: new efforts to encourage this kind of religious element in welfare include the charity tax credit and further implementation of charitable choice-type measures.

Conservatives next. Governmental programs can do—and have done—good. In just the past few decades, hunger and malnutrition have become far less serious social problems thanks to food stamps. Where once one out of every three elderly Americans was in poverty, today that number has dropped to about one in ten, thanks to the indexing of Social Security benefits and Medicare. These are social policy successes virtually without parallel.

Despite its well-documented failures, particularly vis-à-vis the family, the War on Poverty changed the face of poverty. The lesson for conservatives is that keeping intact a safety net of noncash services for the poor—and especially for the children—is crucial to preventing future welfare dependency. In a recent book, *What Money Can't Buy*, University of Chicago professor Susan Mayer pointed out that the two most important things determining a child's future are, first, that his or her basic needs be met, and, second, that he or she be the child of parents with character. Legislatively, little can be done to ensure the second. Realistically, improving the delivery mechanisms for programs like Medicaid so that those who use the services will have better care and better access should be at the forefront of the conservative agenda.

Liberals need to place more trust in the private sector. Long skeptical of some conservative claims that the private sector

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could replace decades-old government programs overnight, some liberals appear to believe that the private sector can actually do very little—while clinging to the belief that true compassion is directly related to federal spending on welfare. In fact, free market charity and social entrepreneurship operating without the debilitating effects of government are the real hopes for making a transformational difference.

Looking to examples like the “He Is Pleased” program in Delaware, founded by mutual fund magnate Foster Friess, the evidence is apparent that the social sector is a market like any other—with one difference: here the profit isn’t financial, it is personal. He Is Pleased helps homeless men and women transition from the streets into full-time employment. Started with venture capital from Friess several years ago, HIP has already helped about 100 homeless people change their lives. Grounded in hard work—a 90-day cycle of paid work cleaning up the city—and tough rules—tardiness is not accepted, drug tests are mandatory—HIP is a social sector equivalent to micro-corporations like Apple or Sun Microsystems 20 years ago. It is cutting-edge, it is optimistic, and it is providing a challenge to established forms of charity. Scores of programs like these have sprung up across the country—they are the best hope for change and need to be supported.

Conservatives must not trust blindly in the private sector. One temptation to which conservatives sometimes succumb is believing that all government programs are bad and all private charity programs are good. Both are quite untrue.

Conservatives ought not to paint too rosy a picture of private sector charity. Rhetorically, they asked Americans to choose between government and charity, HUD or Habitat for Humanity, HHS or the Red Cross, knowing the answer they would get. But in so doing, they ignored the reality that many of the biggest and best known organizations—groups with multibillion dollar budgets and national recognition—have served as little more than private sector surrogates of the welfare state. Groups like the United Way, the Red Cross, and Catholic Charities receive a substantial portion of their funding from the federal government. Not coincidentally, they also tend to reflect in mission, means, and orientation the government model of impersonal, bureaucratic, and secular assistance that is a far cry from the kind of assistance people need. Conservatives who have been at the forefront of critiquing government should now be at the forefront of critiquing the private sector—of pointing out the good, the noble, and the bad. The recently completed National Commission on Philanthropy and Civic Renewal took a much-needed step in this direction.

Work: The First Step to Beating Poverty

Liberals need to better appreciate the importance of work—all work. Too often liberals have focused on the availability of “good” jobs to the exclusion of encouraging employment. Belittling “low-wage” jobs as demeaning, intentionally or unintentionally they sent a message that work, in and of itself, is not that important—that only “good” jobs count.

Conservatives, for their part, need to consider the barriers to moving from welfare to work. Moving to a low-paying job can mean giving up medical benefits for one’s children—a clear systemic barrier to work.

Most studies show that getting and keeping a job, any job, is the most essential step to beating poverty. Finding and keeping a job provides more than income. It provides a sense of self-worth and accomplishment. It does something else as well—it almost guarantees raises. While having focused on job training and job opportunities, liberals haven’t focused enough on putting people to work—a sort of trial by employment fire. Early evidence from the states seems to suggest that for many people on welfare, the new welfare law provided the impetus to change. This is not to say that all have found work or will be able to, but it is an important lesson—one that, as Governor Thompson of Wisconsin has shown, sometimes requires state spending.

Poverty: A Grinding Reality

A final thought for conservatives. Poverty in America is real. Some on the right seem to suggest that poverty is just an invention of the left, that it is mostly a matter of sloth and bad bookkeeping.

While poverty may not be as life-threatening as it once was, it can still be dark and desperate. As accounts like *There Are No Children Here* and *Turning Stones* have shown, poverty is not just “poverty,” though its ravages can turn children into “children”—kids who may be chronologically young but who have seen and experienced life that is beyond the nightmares of many adults.

Coming to grips with the reality of poverty in America may be the most important thing that conservatives can learn from liberals. Certainly it would change the tone of conservatism. Conservatives will have more success undoing the welfare state if they abandon arguments asserting that all of America’s poor are either “undeserving” or “nonexistent.”

The hope that liberals and conservatives can take the time to learn from each other on matters of poverty springs from the common ground they have already found in the need to strengthen America’s civil sector. In just the past half-decade, politicians, pundits, and professors from across the ideological spectrum have come to the recognition that the real hope of reform and the true answers to long-vexing social problems will come from “civil society.”

That agreement is rooted in a common appreciation that communities and civic groups and churches have strengths and abilities beyond the dreams of government. They are actively and intimately involved in needy individuals’ lives. They share a common code of moral responsibility that provides guidance and guardrails. They have elements of faith that touch people in a far more profound way than a check or a voucher.

If this kind of agreement could find a way to grow in the poisonous atmosphere of the last welfare debate, let us all hope that in this calm after the storm the two sides will come together even more closely and revivify our common lives. ■

NO Paintbrushes, NO Paint

The Realities of Volunteer Work

BY JANE R. EISNER

Last January, when the presidential summit on community service was still on the drawing board, there was a renewed attempt to turn the national holiday for Martin Luther King, Jr., into a real day of service. A day on, not a day off, its supporters said.

I took it seriously—not only as a journalist, but as a mother of three school-age girls. Which is why, early on the morning of January 20, I filled up the van with my kids and their friends and drove to a dilapidated church in North Philadelphia to...serve.

We arrived at the appointed hour and were told to sit in the cavernous, second-floor space that needed a good scrub—and more—before it could be transformed into a meeting room for a drug and alcohol rehab center. There we waited, and waited. The room filled with a rainbow of chattering students and adults, white and black, city and suburban, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim. All waiting.

Finally, an hour and a half later, we were given a rousing sermon and put to work. Only there weren't enough paintbrushes, or ladders, or rollers to paint the alcove. There weren't enough new squares of carpet to replace the old ones. Nor enough frames for the posters. The older kids managed to keep occupied; my seven-year-old felt useless. We left mid-day, half satisfied that we made, perhaps, a small contribution.

Jane R. Eisner is editorial page editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer.

ILLUSTRATION BY GLENN PIERCE

That evening, I asked my youngest daughter as I put her to bed: "Wouldn't it be great if next year all the kids in your grade volunteered on King Day?"

"But, Mom," she replied, "will there be something to do?"

Her question has haunted me ever since, as I have seen the nation fall in love with the promise and potential of addressing the needs of its young through community service. I, too, am enchanted by the goodness it evokes, the opportunity to help the less fortunate, to overcome the isolation that grips too many of us, comfortable in our neighborhoods, ready to hide behind busy lives. I've done enough volunteer work to know that it doesn't always produce tangible results; sometimes, it's the doing that makes a difference.

But now that the hype and hoopla of the Presidents' Summit has come and gone, I am still worried that good intentions and unrealistic expectations are going to beat out common sense. And common sense dictates that unless community service is employed wisely, it won't make any more of a difference than we did at the North Philadelphia church. Sometimes, it can even do more harm than good.

Volunteer work, if done right, is work, with complexity and consequence. If not done right, it can accomplish nothing or, worse, it can leave the lonely and suffering even more bereft, and blunt the passion in those wishing to serve.

Good Intentions Are Not Enough

More than good intentions are necessary if community service is going to help feed, heal, teach, and mentor those in need. There must be an infrastructure.

Now, the eloquent preacher who runs the drug rehab center should not be blamed for the paucity of paintbrushes or carpet squares. It's his job to turn around lives, not organize cleanups. But somebody—from a local business, perhaps?—should have scoured the scene a

volunteers at kids, something's going to happen," he said earlier this year in Philadelphia, where the national headquarters is based. "Not true. You need the infrastructure. People don't understand or value what it takes to orient and train volunteers and to support the

mentoring relationship after the match. It's not glitzy, but you need it."

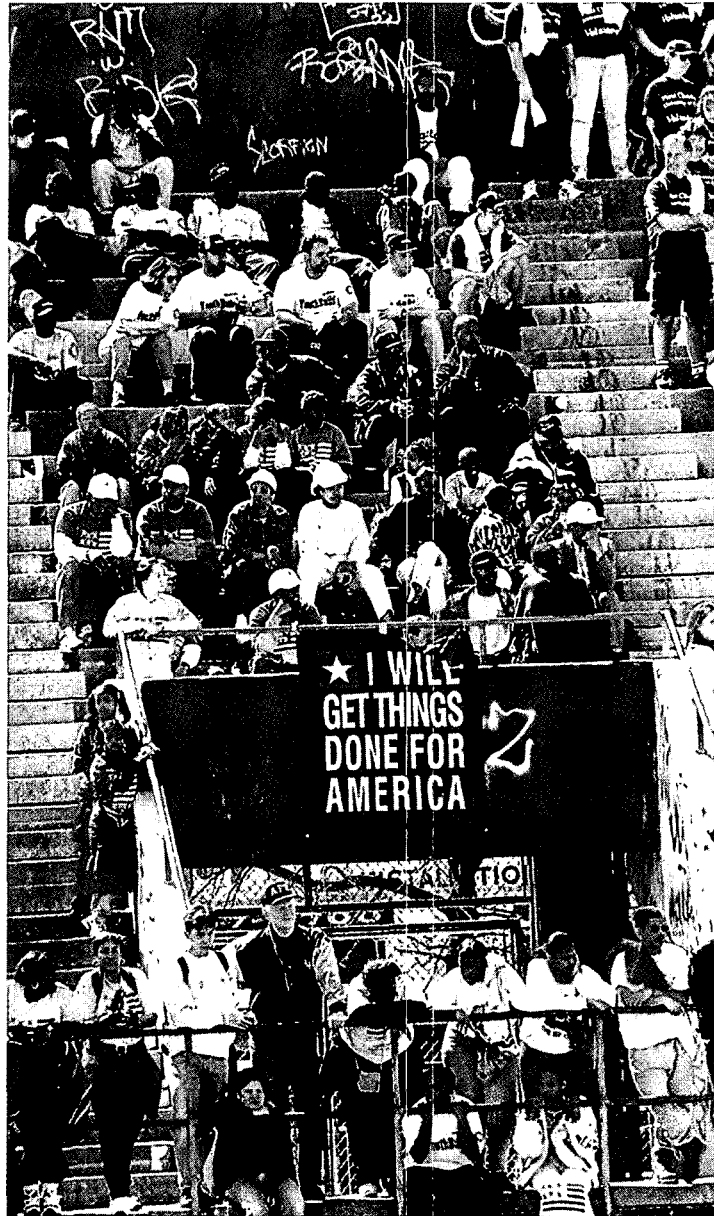
It's not just kids who need it. The elderly do as well. Judith Rodin, president of the University of Pennsylvania, has written about research done by a colleague in a Pittsburgh nursing home in the 1970s. Some of the elderly residents were visited occasionally by local undergraduates, according to no schedule. Other residents were allowed to set the time and duration of the visits.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the elderly who had been put in control were more alert and in better health. When the study was over, students went home for spring break and the visits ended. A year and a half later, the researchers returned to the nursing home and made a startling finding: more of the residents with control had died than had the others.

When the contact and attention that the elderly themselves had controlled abruptly stopped—even though they were warned that it would—the effects

were profound. They were left with less than nothing.

Does this mean that students should immediately stop visiting elderly residents of nursing homes? Of course not. But the visits must be shaped into the context of the lives of the elderly. Don't give without preparing for what happens when you take away—especially from a vulnerable, needy population.



ALAN BRIAN NILSEN/STGMA

week earlier, sized up the need, purchased all the necessary supplies, and prepared for the influx of volunteers.

Thomas McKenna, national executive director of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America, has faced this issue: his widely recognized mentoring program was sometimes chided for being carefully slow and small. "There's a mystical notion people have that if you throw

The main goal of volunteer work isn't to make the volunteer feel better, although that is a hoped-for consequence. It's to accomplish something that other private or public sources cannot and to enhance the volunteer's sense of responsibility to the greater community. Benjamin Barber, director of the Walt Whitman Center for the Culture and Politics of Democracy at Rutgers University, says the approach a volunteer brings to the work is most important.

Is she there out of a sense of noblesse oblige, to do something charitable without addressing the underlying problem? Barber tells of a student who, after a year volunteering in a homeless shelter, said, "This was the most extraordinary experience I've ever had. I just hope my children will have a chance to do it." (And I guess we all should hope the homeless will still be around to give our kids the same warm glow.)

Or is she there in a spirit of partnership, to serve an immediate need and to work toward a time when her children won't have to help out at a shelter because most homelessness will have been prevented? The volunteer's long-term goal should not be to perpetuate her role, but to make it superfluous.

Barber tells another story that drives home the need to place community service in context. His Rutgers students were divided into groups to work on specific service projects. Some were sent to work at a homeless shelter, others to paint the plugs of fire hydrants in a near-by community.

After a couple of weeks, the painting crew complained. This is community service? We should be helping the needy, not painting hydrants! Barber then had the students meet with an official from the community, and his explanation made all the difference.

It turns out that the community's firefighters had wanted the plugs painted because it would help them locate the plugs more quickly when the hydrants were knee-high in snow and ice. It was a particularly urgent job because the previous year, a year of heavy winter weather, two residents may have died in fires because the hydrant plugs were so difficult to find. And the

community itself didn't have the money to pay municipal workers do the job.

Once given the context, the students returned to the work with zeal, convinced that they were contributing to a healthier community.

So volunteer work must be placed in its proper context. It must be well coordinated and targeted to help a specific need. And, finally, it must be recognized for what it is: often an enormous help, but not often a replacement for the public or private sector responsibility. It certainly has its limitations.

**My hope is that
serving others should
become a natural
part of life for every
American, as long as
it does more good
than harm.**

The Germantown Avenue Cleanup

Consider the situation on Philadelphia's Germantown Avenue as an illustration of that last point. The long, important thoroughfare that winds through some of Philadelphia's seediest neighborhoods was the scene of a massive volunteer cleanup on the day before the Presidents' Summit. The *Inquirer's* Marc Kaufman returned to the street a week later, and here's what he found.

Although more than 6,000 people registered to work that day, and hundreds were turned away because there were no more work slots left, neon-colored tags—"work orders" instructing volunteers to clean or paint over graffiti—still covered blocks of storefronts and restaurants and scores of rowhouse walls. City officials acknowledged that 20–25 percent of the work orders were not finished. And a fair number of the walls that were cleaned had to be re-

visited by paid city crews, because of the poor work quality. One storefront, for instance, was a motley patchwork of light blue, dark blue, gray, and yellow.

There were several reasons for the spotty performance. Trucks couldn't always get through Secret Service barricades to distribute paint and rollers. Relatively few local residents joined outside volunteers in the southern, hardest-hit stretch of Germantown Avenue. And hard-to-reach graffiti were deliberately left for city crews to deal with.

But the underlying reason, Kaufman reported, is that much volunteer work is inherently inefficient. Most volunteers aren't as skilled, as focused, or as productive as paid professionals—especially at a massive effort like this, one that attracted the president and so many other distracting celebrities. Donna Cooper, who organized the Germantown Avenue cleanup and is now a deputy mayor, said, "I think the conclusion is unavoidable—volunteer work is great, but it is very inefficient and can seldom do the job as well as a paid staff. That's no rap on volunteers, who did a terrific job. That's just reality."

And remember: as volunteer efforts go, cleaning up Germantown Avenue or the church in North Philadelphia is relatively easy and requires far less commitment than mentoring or tutoring a child. Painting a building doesn't demand the same dedication and skill as the delicate, difficult job of helping to turn around a young life. That's not an activity for a Sunday morning in the sun.

If the growing gap between government action and public need is going to be filled through community service, then the limitations and realities of volunteer work must be recognized. This is not said to dull any of the spirit of the summit or diminish the extraordinary work done by volunteers nationwide, whose sense of citizenship compelled them to help the needy long before the bunting went up on Independence Hall. My hope is that serving others should become a natural part of life for every American, as long as it does more good than harm. ■

THE FARE SKIES

Air Transportation and Middle America

BY STEVEN A. MORRISON AND CLIFFORD WINSTON

When Congress and the Civil Aeronautics Board deregulated the nation's airlines in a series of steps during the late 1970s, policymakers expected travelers' fares to fall, but were apprehensive that small communities would lose airline service as deregulation reshaped the air travel market. Congress was sufficiently concerned that it set up the Essential Air Service Program to provide subsidies to carriers to ensure at least two flights a day for 150 small communities.

Every serious study of airline deregulation in the intervening years has found that travelers have indeed benefited enormously. As we documented in our 1995 Brookings book, *The Evolution of the Airline Industry*, airfares, adjusted for inflation, fell 33 percent between 1976—just before the CAB instigated regulatory reforms—and 1993. Deregulation was

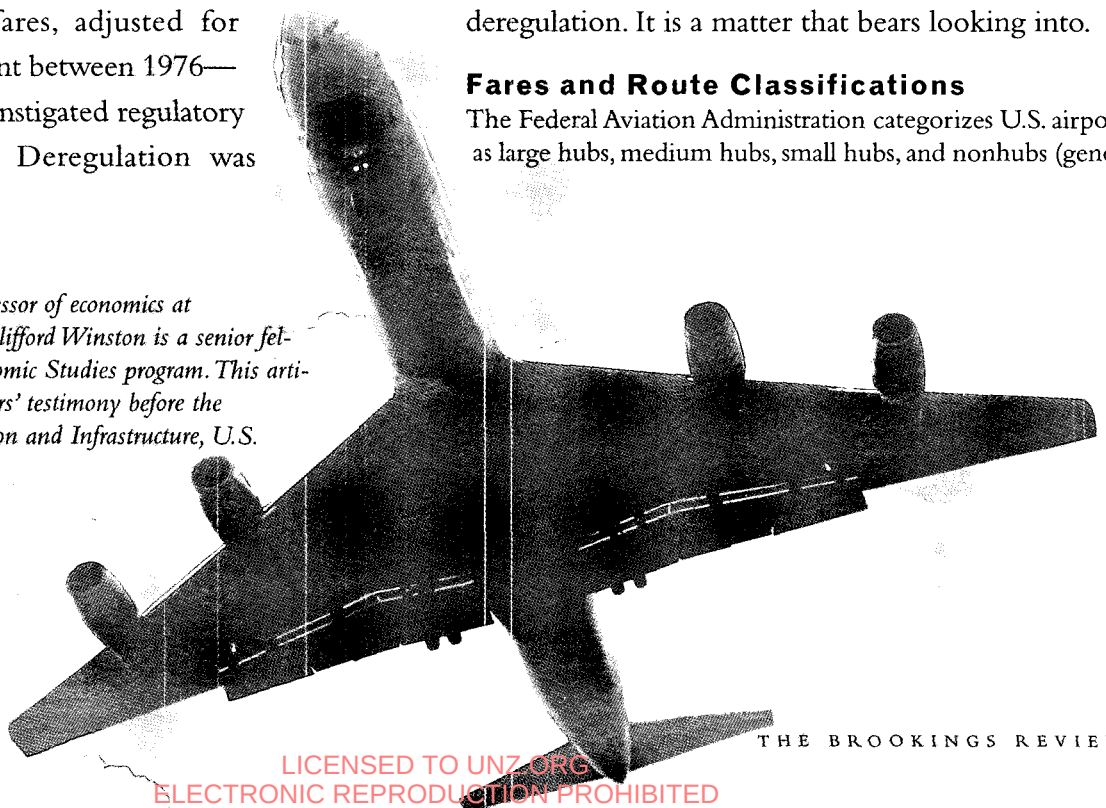
directly responsible for at least 60 percent of the decline—responsible, that is, for a 20 percent drop in fares. And travelers have benefited not only from low fares, but from better service, particularly increased flight frequency.

Still, policymakers have kept a vigilant eye on air carriers and registered their concern whenever it appeared that some travelers were being treated unfairly. Today, there is a growing sense, spurred by the anecdotes of many travelers, that America's smaller cities are indeed being shortchanged by deregulation. Flights between smaller cities, it is charged, have higher fares than flights of comparable distances between large cities. Some members of Congress have publicly questioned the fairness and even the wisdom of deregulation. It is a matter that bears looking into.

Fares and Route Classifications

The Federal Aviation Administration categorizes U.S. airports as large hubs, medium hubs, small hubs, and nonhubs (gener-

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ally speaking, the categories simply suggest the relative size of the cities where the airports are located, but see figure 1 for the technical basis of these classifications). We use the FAA's categories to classify airline routes into a hub class based on the airports involved. Thus, a flight between a large hub and a small hub would be classified as a large hub route and a small hub route. An examination of fare and service patterns for all hub types from 1977 (the year before formal deregulation in 1978) through 1996 shows how deregulation has affected different sized cities and airports. (As in previous work, we measure the difference between actual deregulated fares and what fares would have been under regulation; we estimate regulated fares by adjusting—as explained in the notes to figure 1—the fare formula used by the CAB during the final few years of regulation.) In 1996, travelers paid, on average, 28 percent less for trips than they would have if airlines had remained regulated. The gains are not confined to travelers between large cities. Indeed, travelers on all routes paid lower fares (see figure 1). Deregulated fares were 29 percent lower for trips involving a large hub, 32 percent lower for trips involving a medium hub, and 17 percent lower for trips involving a small hub. Even non-hubs saw a small decline in fares.

Sources of Fare Differences

Although all travelers are now enjoying lower fares, on average, as a result of deregulation, it is clear that travelers at large and medium hub airports have benefited more than those at small and nonhub airports. There are two possible explanations for the difference. One is a lack of competition. The other is costs. Policy options would arise if government policymakers could do something that would either enhance competition or lower airline costs—or both—and therefore

increase the benefits from deregulation, especially for travelers at small and nonhub airports.

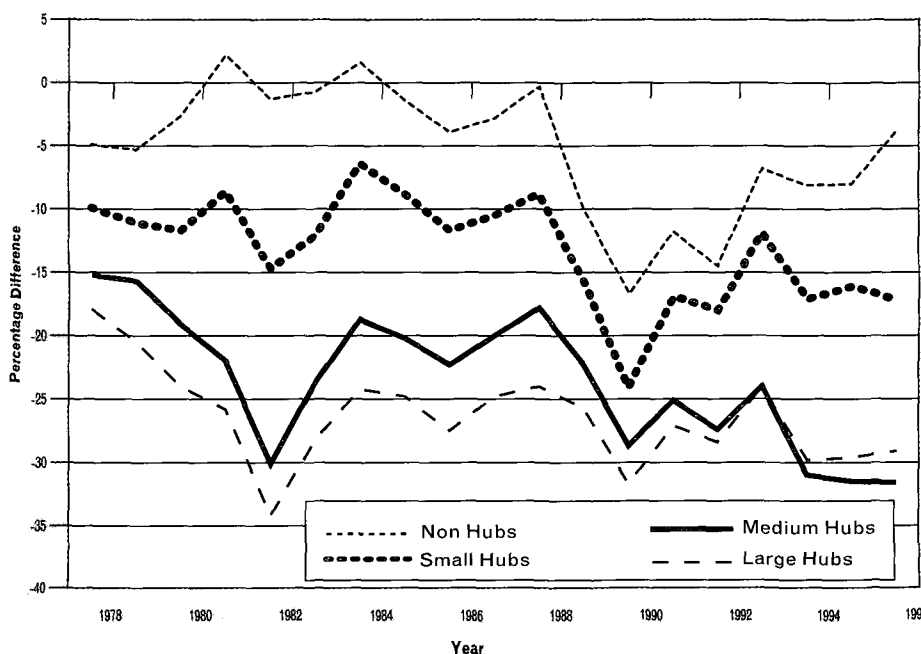
Before deregulation introduced competition to the airline industry, regulators monitored all routes and seldom authorized entry by would-be competitors. With the advent of deregulation, both incumbent airlines, such as American and United, and the many new airlines, such as People Express and Southwest Airlines, that sprang up in the new competitive market were free to enter all routes. Not surprisingly, competition—as measured by the number of equal-sized competitors—has increased on routes of all hub classifications (see figure 2). Today large hub and medium hub routes are about equally competitive. Small hub and nonhub routes, however, have fewer competitors because their markets are smaller.

Although the number of equal-sized competitors is an important indicator of competition on a route, the identity of the carriers is also important. Two routes may have the same number of competitors and be comparable in other ways, but one may enjoy lower fares because it is served by a low-cost (low-fare) carrier and the other route is not. Indeed, the growth of new low-cost carriers, such as Southwest Airlines, has been one of the most important consequences of airline deregulation. As figure 3 shows, new entrants are serving all routes. They are providing the greatest share of service at medium hub airports and about equal shares to small hubs and large hubs.

In short, competition does vary by hub classification, but large hub routes are not the only ones on which competition has increased significantly since deregulation. Medium hub routes appear more competitive than large hub routes, and small hub routes are clearly attracting competition from new airlines.

What about cost differences? There are at least two important sources of air transportation economies. The first is larger

Figure 1 Fare Declines Caused by Deregulation, by Airport Classification



Hub classifications: Communities enplaning 1 percent or more of the total are large hubs; those enplaning between 0.25 percent and 0.99 percent of the total are medium hubs; those enplaning between 0.05 percent and 0.24 percent of the total are small hubs; those enplaning less than 0.05 percent of the total are nonhubs. Origin-destination travel between large hubs or between a large hub and a medium hub accounts for roughly 75 percent of all travel.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Data Bank 1A, Ticket Origin and Destination Survey, and the Department of Transportation Standard Industry Fare Level (SIFL). The SIFL is revised semiannually based on changes in airlines' cost per available seat mile. Because deregulation has led airlines to improve productivity and lower their costs, the SIFL must be adjusted for productivity increases before it is used to predict what regulated fares would have been. We used the evidence provided by Douglas W. Caves, and others ("An Assessment of the Efficiency Effects of U.S. Airline Deregulation via an International Comparison," in Elizabeth E. Bailey, ed., *Public Regulation: New Perspectives on Institutions and Policies*, [MIT Press, 1987], pp. 285-320) that deregulation led to an increase in airlines' productivity of 1.2% per year from 1976 to 1983 (the last year in their study). Thus, our procedure conservatively estimates the benefits from deregulation because the deregulated environment has caused airlines' productivity to continue to increase since 1983.

aircraft. As one would expect, the cost per seat is lower on large planes than on small planes because the fixed costs of aircraft operations are averaged over more seats. The second is larger load factors. For an aircraft of any given size, costs per passenger fall as more seats are filled.

Airlines trade off those economies with flight frequency. Although carriers can fly big planes on routes with few passengers, they would have to cut flight frequency to fill enough seats to cover costs and earn a profit. Because travelers value frequent service, carriers and travelers on low-density routes find it mutually beneficial to have, for example, a small plane provide service twice a day, rather than have a large plane provide service once a day. Indeed, if nonhub and large hub routes had the same aircraft sizes and load factors, nonhub routes would have 62 percent fewer flights than they now have.

Thus, the more passengers a route has, the greater economies it can achieve. Naturally, the larger the hub route, the greater the traffic—and the larger the aircraft serving it and the higher the load factor on it. Because airlines are able to realize the greatest economies on large hub routes, they will have the lowest costs on these routes, other things equal.

How much of the variation in fares among hub routes is explained by differences in competition and costs? According to our estimates, differences in load factor account for about *half* of the observed differences in fares for small and nonhub routes relative to large hub routes. Differences in aircraft size account for about *40 percent* of the difference. The relative lack of competition at small and nonhub airports accounts for only about *10 percent* of the cost differences. Medium and large hubs are nearly equally competitive. But lower load factors and smaller aircraft at medium hubs should make their fares about 5 percent higher than fares at large hubs. In fact, their fares are 4 percent *lower* than fares at large hubs because of the

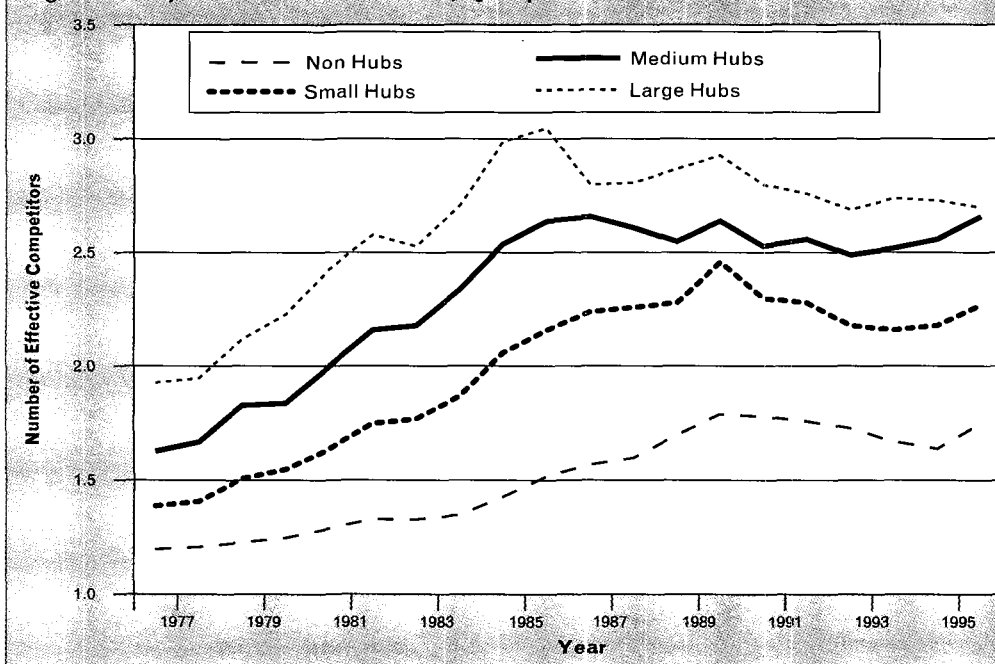
strong presence of new entrants on their routes. (We note for the benefit of readers interested in our methodology that the estimates rely on a competition “elasticity” of -0.1 , indicating that if the number of competitors on a route increases by 1 percent, fares fall 0.1 percent. They also incorporate an aircraft seat-mile cost elasticity of -0.2 , indicating that costs per seat mile fall by 0.2 percent when aircraft size, measured in seats, increases by 1 percent.)

Differences in Service

Certainly deregulation has affected fares, but what about service—particularly flight departures and cities served? According to data from the U.S. Department of Transportation, since the airline industry was deregulated, daily departures have increased considerably at large and medium hub airports, moderately at small hub airports, and slightly even at nonhub airports. An indicator such as daily departures, however, does not include connecting flights and thus substantially understates travelers’ feasible flight alternatives. For example, because of the existence of connections, an additional aircraft departure from a nonhub to a large hub increases the number of flight alternatives on many connecting routes. The accelerated development of hub-and-spoke operations since deregulation has led to an increase in connections, especially on small and nonhub routes. In our 1986 Brookings book, *The Economic Effects of Airline Deregulation*, we estimated that feasible flight alternatives had increased as much as 20–30 percent on small hub and nonhub routes. Of course one way that airlines were able to increase the number of daily departures was by sacrificing economies of aircraft size and load factor in favor of greater flight frequency—a development that kept fares higher than they otherwise would have been.

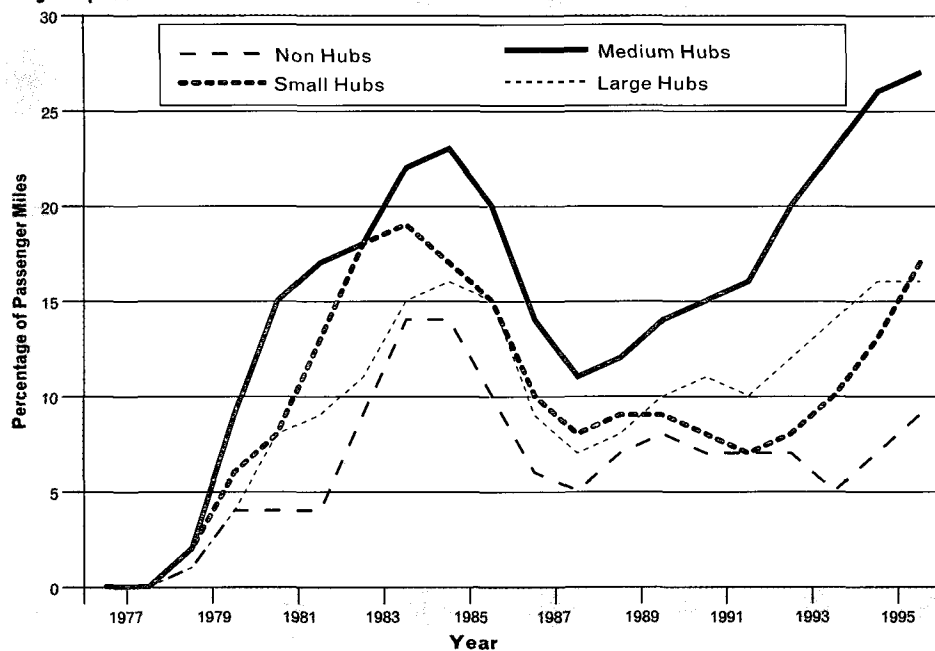
Deregulation has also sharply increased the number of

Figure 2 Competition at the Route Level, by Airport Classification



Source: Authors' calculations based on data from the U.S. DOT, Ticket Origin and Destination Survey. Because a simple count of carriers on a route would treat a carrier with a large market share as of equal importance as one with a small market share, we use a measure of competition that takes market share into account. In particular, we use the inverse of the widely used Herfindahl index, which equals the sum of the square of each firm's market share. Thus, if two carriers each had a 50% market share, the Herfindahl index would be $0.50^2 + 0.50^2 = 0.50$. Inverting gives two equal-sized competitors. The same result would occur with three carriers with market shares of two-thirds, one-sixth, and one-sixth.

Figure 3 Share of Passenger Miles Provided by Airlines Originating After Deregulation, by Airport Classification



Source: Same as figure 2.

cities served nonstop at all airports. The accelerated development of hub-and-spoke operations has also increased the number of cities served with a connection at small and non-hub airports.

Slot-Controlled Airports

The volume of complaints about the perceived failures of deregulation in small cities has been so loud that it seems to have deafened policymakers to a few voices (ours among them) pointing to a relatively small but real glitch in deregulation at four airports in three of the nation's largest cities. Since the late 1960s regulatory limits have been imposed on the number of arriving and departing planes at Chicago O'Hare, New York La Guardia, New York Kennedy, and Washington National in an effort to decrease congestion. These regulatory limits, which survived airline industry deregulation, decrease both departure frequencies and competition. According to our estimates, last year carriers charged one-way fares that averaged from \$17 to \$22 higher (11–15 percent) on routes involving O'Hare, La Guardia, and Washington National than they charged for flights of similar distance that did not involve these "slot-controlled" airports. Fares at Kennedy Airport were not higher than those on comparable routes.

As we have argued elsewhere, the inefficiencies due to the slot system could be eliminated if the system—whose very purpose, as noted, is to reduce congestion—were replaced by congestion pricing—charging aircraft for their takeoffs and landings according to the cost of the delay that each aircraft imposes on other aircraft. During peak travel times, when one plane can delay many others, the cost would be high. At other times, it would be low, perhaps nothing. Current airport fees are based on aircraft weight, so that fees for large passenger

planes are high while those for general aviation and commuter planes are low. The fees have nothing to do with the costs of delay, which can be caused almost equally by large and small planes. Congestion charges would reduce delays from congestion by encouraging planes, especially general aviation and commuter planes, to use congested airports during off-peak periods or to switch to less congested airports.

The Department of Transportation has recently signaled an interest in promoting competition at slot-controlled airports by making more slots available and encouraging low-cost carriers in particular to apply for the new ones. The implicit concern is that slots are preventing low-cost carriers from competing at these airports. But the evidence does not bear this out. According to our calculations, new entrant carriers

provide 8 percent of passenger miles at slot-controlled airports and 20 percent at airports that were not subject to slot controls. When Southwest Airlines, which has an explicit and well-known strategy of avoiding congested airports, is excluded, the share of passenger miles provided by new entrants at airports that are not slot-controlled falls to 10 percent, which is roughly comparable to their share at slot-controlled airports. Slot controls, then, do not appear to be a serious barrier to competition from new entrants in particular, though they do impede competition in general. Policymakers at the Department of Transportation could improve efficiency at congested airports far more readily by supporting a move to abolish the slot system altogether and replace it with efficient congestion pricing. Regulatory watchdogs on Capitol Hill should also take note that fares for travelers to these metropolitan airports—which sometimes include travelers from small cities around the nation—could well fall if congestion pricing is adopted.

It Ain't Broke, So Don't Fix It

Anecdotes about high fares and infrequent service in some markets are sure to continue to attract lawmakers' attention and to raise questions about whether action should be taken to improve the fairness of deregulated air fares and service. Certainly problems persist at slot-controlled airports, where congestion pricing would enable the market to work efficiently. But differences in fares at different sized airports are not arbitrary. The vast majority of those differences reflect underlying cost differences, rather than anticompetitive effects, and we see no reason for government involvement. The market, while by no means perfect, is proving a strong protector of fairness to air travelers. ■

How much longer will it be before the American people awaken to the realization that we are confronted today by a crisis in civil-military relations? How many more unseemly and embarrassing incidents and abuses of public trust involving the military will it take to make us see that the failings of the military, egregious enough in themselves, are simply the most telltale signs of a larger crisis that has enormous implications for our national security?

No single incident of late—not the highly publicized dismissal from the Air Force of Lieutenant Kelly Flinn, or the adultery-related withdrawal of General Joseph Ralston from consideration as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or the multiple charges of sexual misconduct against the sergeant major of the army, or the ongoing series of court-martial trials of army trainers for massive sexual abuse at Aberdeen Proving Ground and Darmstadt, Germany—constitutes a crisis in and of itself. But these events are not isolated aberrations. They are part of a far larger pattern of institutional misbehavior that includes the security and intelligence lapses that produced the Khobar Towers truck bombing in Saudi Arabia, the safety and equipment failures that led to the deaths of the secretary of commerce and 34 others in a plane crash in Croatia, the suicide of a chief of naval operations who faced allegations that he had been wearing unauthorized combat decorations, white supremacist elements in one of our most “elite” combat divisions, the rapes of young girls by U.S. servicemen in Okinawa and Australia, general officers misappropriating military aircraft for personal and family use, the profligate procurement of gold-plated weapon systems that have failed major performance tests, revelations that the Pentagon may have withheld and distorted information dealing both with the exposure of perhaps thousands of soldiers to depleted uranium munitions and chemical agents and with the performance of expensive armaments in the 1991 Persian Gulf war, and countless other breaches of the public trust.

At one level, such recurring incidents typify a military

institution that (as distinct from the individuals who constitute it) is seriously diseased—characterized not by an ethos of duty, honor, and country, but by parochialism, a steady undercurrent of chest-thumping machismo, and a disturbing degree of self-serving advocacy and duplicity.

At a deeper level, these events reflect a breakdown among the three parties to the triad of civil-military relations: the military itself; the civilian officials who ostensibly control the military; and the people, who bear ultimate responsibility under republican rule for overseeing the military’s civilian overseers.

It may not be at all clear how—or even whether—to cure the military’s ills. Judging from the feeble response to date of the country’s most senior decisionmakers, both civilian and military, it isn’t even clear that they recognize, much less are willing to admit and deal with, the problem. (Perhaps that is because they are so much the culprits themselves.) The start of a solution, though, must rest with our collective ability as a nation to discover the source of the disease rather than simply acknowledging its most obvious symptoms. And the source of the disease lies deep: in the expectations the three parties involved have of one another and in their uniform failure to measure up.

Civilian Leaders and the Military

What are these expectations? To the practiced observer, they are obvious. For their part, civilian officials, presidents in particular, expect two things above all else from the military.

The first is operational competence—the ability to accomplish assigned missions, whatever they may be. The second is sound advice. Of course, there are no clearly objective bases for determining what constitutes either. Both are inherently subjective and depend ultimately on the powers of discernment possessed by those who make such judgments. An uninformed observer—whether political appointee or average citizen—devoid of military understanding, especially of the strategic ramifications of military affairs, is fundamentally ill-equipped to distinguish a military that is doing well what it should be doing from one that is doing either the right thing badly or the wrong thing satisfactorily. We see and hear much of this today from those in authority who, wishing to establish their bona fides, incessantly mouth the platitudes of *milatarese*—“readiness,” “*op tempo*,” “warfighting”—without having the first demonstrable clue as to what militaries actually do or ought to do, much less how.

Soundness of advice similarly may have much—or little—

FAILED EXPECTATIONS

The Crisis of Civil-Military Relations in America

BY GREGORY D. FOSTER

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to do with how broad (strategic) or narrow (purely military) the advice is, whether it reinforces or runs counter to what its recipients want to hear, or whether it truly determines results that are subject to so many other intervening influences. Success or failure, in other words—whether in policy or operations, whether in Bosnia or Aberdeen Proving Ground, whether concerned with NATO expansion or the treatment of homosexuals—may bear little direct relationship to the soundness of advice that precedes action (or inaction).

Beyond expecting operational competence and sound advice, civilian officials give ample evidence that they expect three other things from their uniformed charges. First, they expect generally unquestioning obedience, not merely to legitimate political direction, but to the full range of civilian dictates and desires (however frivolous, ill-conceived, or self-serving). By this line of reasoning, even responsible dissent is considered disobedience. And no task—ushering at the White House, for instance—is considered too inconsequential to direct dutiful military personnel to perform. Second, they expect a measure of political sensitivity that takes the form, if not of outright docility, at least of responsible enough conduct to avoid becoming a political liability. And finally, they expect sufficient affordability not to visibly drain resources from other political priorities.

The military, in turn, expects several things from civilian officials generally and presidents specifically. The most important, executive competence, reflects the degree to which civilian decisionmakers demonstrate the cardinal leadership traits of courage, decisiveness, integrity, and vision in sufficient measure to earn the deference the military expects, and is expected, to give.

No less, though, does the military seek from its civilian masters clear strategic guidance—an unambiguous articulation of national purpose, direction, and priorities that charts the country's course into the future. Such guidance, when available, transcends and provides an antidote to the momentary imperatives of expediency that pervade the policy process. It also establishes a rational basis for allocating national resources, preventing constant crisis, determining military requirements, and justifying the use or nonuse of the military under particular circumstances. It thereby assures the military and the public that those in charge know what they are doing, understand the complexities of the world around them, and are motivated by something more consequential than self-interest.

Executive competence and clear strategic guidance represent the high end of the military's expectations of civilian officials and are only rarely delivered. Politics doesn't ensure competence in actual governing—as many in office regularly demonstrate. Moreover, politicians typically show little inclination, even if they are able, to produce the sort of specific blueprint for action that opponents could use to hold them accountable for their performance.

Accordingly, the military generally is content to limit its expectations of civilian officials to two minimal obligations. The first is appreciation and support—if not understanding—of the military's purposes and uses, its capabilities and limitations, its needs and concerns, and its value to society. The sec-

ond is sufficient political acumen to get things done, properly and effectively, in the messy, frustratingly pluralistic worlds of domestic and international politics.

The military's expectation that civilian officials show appreciation and support is, in a deeper sense, a desire that the civilians who command its allegiance display enough reciprocal loyalty and familiarity with military affairs to give them empathetic license for exercising the martial prerogatives of the state. And if the military, socialized as it is to prize order and efficiency, is rightly to stay out of politics—at least of the low, partisan variety—the least politicians can do is to practice the requisite statesmanship to make the system work the way civic indoctrination has convinced us it can and should.

The Military and the People

No less telling in their impact on the attitudes, comportment, and performance of the armed forces are the military's expectations of the people. Though hoping for true appreciation, the military expects the support of the citizenry—if only as psychological recompense for the sacrifices the military sees itself making—but seems willing to accept mere noninterference in its professional affairs as a minimal reflection of public trust. The military also seems to expect civic commitment and public order from the people as essential signs of the public's willingness to meet the obligations of citizenship (preferably of the compliant, deferential kind).

The people seem to share with civilian officials the expectation that the military provide operational competence and sound advice—although the public's powers of discernment and judgment, as well as the concomitant good-faith willingness to forsake the rights to know about and speak out on allegedly sensitive national security matters, vary widely. Thus given to more-or-less blind trust in those who profess to serve them, the people therefore also implicitly ask that their military maintain strict political neutrality—distancing itself from partisan politics, staying out of domestic affairs—and that military personnel conform to the highest standards of ethical and legal conduct, even if the international environment in which they may have to operate is the Hobbesian jungle realists tell us it is and must be.

Civilian Leaders and the People

What is not so clear is what civilian officials and the people expect of one another and, moreover, where Congress fits in the equation—whether as extension and voice of the people, as representative of an elitist political class that consorts with executive branch officials over the heads of the people, or as an independent force with its own agenda, perspective, and expertise. One would like to think that the people (including Congress) expect civilian officials to demonstrate executive competence, provide clear strategic guidance, and serve the public interest unconditionally; and that civilian officials, in turn, expect active, knowledgeable civic participation for the common good from the people. A more cynical view, tempered by experience, suggests that what both parties ought to seek from the other is quite the opposite of what they actually do expect or want.

Disturbing Implications

Today precious few of the mutual expectations the three parties to the civil-military relationship have of one another are being met. From these failed expectations flows the crisis that now afflicts us. Ideally the military would be a useful, usable instrument of national power that facilitates the attainment of the country's strategic goals, as well as a socially, politically, and economically responsible institution that contributes to the preservation and functioning of civil society. Civilian authorities would establish definitive strategic purpose and direction for the country, effectively manage events and circumstances, and exercise responsible military oversight. The people would be civically engaged and employ reasoned judgment to rigorously oversee the military's overseers.

Reality has fallen well short of this ideal. Civilian officials, increasingly devoid of firsthand or even derivative military experience (a general portent of the future that has been especially pronounced in the Clinton administration), have shown commensurately little faculty for critical discernment in military matters. Having further been consistently less than adroit in the larger conduct of international affairs, they have failed to engender the minimal credibility necessary to compensate for their military illiteracy. Instead they have feigned understanding and support—first, by invariably deferring to established military practices and preferences; second, by shamelessly invoking insider rhetoric, not only to mask their substantive shortcomings, but also to counter prospective criticism and to ingratiate themselves with potentially restive military elements.

At the same time, under the guise of urgency and national self-defense, these civilian officials have perpetuated the practice common to all recent presidencies of repeatedly circumventing—or at least outmaneuvering—Congress in committing U.S. troops abroad. Bosnia, and the accompanying promise—deceitful and unfulfilled—to pull U.S. troops out within a year of their deployment, is but the most glaring recent example. The result has been a progressive, largely subliminal diminution of effective civilian control of the military.

The military—parochial to a fault, insatiably greedy for resources and the expensive appurtenances of its craft, disturbingly politicized at the top, and beset by a largely unrecognized but nonetheless real and pervasive civic illiteracy within its own ranks—has made the most of its practiced bureaucratic and political survival skills. While ostensibly accepting a variety of nontraditional assignments that its core true believers consider extraneous and burdensome—peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and the like—and while zealously trumpeting itself as the revolutionary vanguard for a new age of third-wave, fourth-generation cyberwar, the military has remained mired in a hidebound conception of war and self whose central tenets are only too familiar: war is inevitable; peace, never but a temporary respite, is a function of one's readiness for war; war is traditional combat; victory in war goes to the party most proficient in the application of violence; the military exists solely to prepare for and wage war; the profession of arms therefore occupies privileged standing and subscribes to a superior ethos which should be immune

from the meddling scrutiny of unworthy amateurs.

Such beliefs, deeply ingrained in the thinking of uniformed professionals and their most ardent acolytes (including more than a few on Capitol Hill), have led the military to continue preparing, as always, for the wars of the past; to deny the relevance of—and therefore to be generally unprepared for—the many contemporary contingencies that do not conform to the traditional model of war; and, accordingly, to give experience-impaired civilian officials little strategic maneuver room in responding to emergent crises between the equally unpalatable options of inaction and failure. These same beliefs, because they reflect something deeper about the types of individuals the institution attracts and rewards in fulfilling its sense of mission and self, also have contributed materially to the military's incessant incident proneness. Such incidents constitute a form of collective institutional disobedience apparently too subtle for most of us to recognize for what it is—the outgrowth of an institution that has lost its identity, that no longer has confidence in or respect for those it is supposed to serve.

The people, finally—increasingly disenchanted, cynical, and alienated, and captive still of the Cold War mentality that convinced them they endanger the republic by knowing too much about or questioning the methods or motives of their military and its civilian masters—evinced varying degrees of apathy, hostility, and distrust, all of which undermine national will, societal civility, and the very life of democracy itself. Congress, in turn, far from fulfilling the republican ideal, has generally set itself above the people and repeatedly shown its cultivated incapacity as a deliberative body, as an effective check on presidential excess, and as a representative voice for popular sovereignty.

In their totality, these conditions call to mind the facetious Cold War aphorism that under Communism the workers pretend to work, and the state pretends to pay them. Similarly might it be said that under post-Cold War American democracy, civilians pretend to control the military, and the military pretends to be controlled.

The implications of this are profound. In the final analysis, the very viability and vitality of the institutions that make up the civil-military triad—their capacity, that is, to cope with and act purposefully on their governing domestic and international environments—depend fundamentally on their ability to measure up to the expectations they have of one another. When these expectations are met, the social glue of trust and confidence that results produces bona fide moral authority. The attendant mutual credibility, acceptance, and legitimation thus engender the unity—of purpose, effort, and action—so essential to executive energy, able governance, and overall strategic effectiveness.

Conversely, when these mutual expectations go unmet, the result almost invariably is alienation, distrust, disunity—and, ultimately, strategic debilitation. We are at that point today—withstanding our self-absorbed, chest-thumping claims to Lone Superpower status. If we don't act quickly to reverse the situation, we will pay the price in ways that will leave us to reminisce about the glory we once enjoyed. ■



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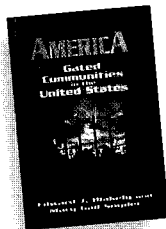
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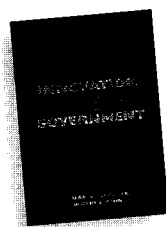
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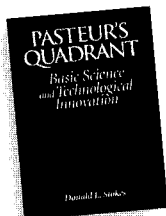
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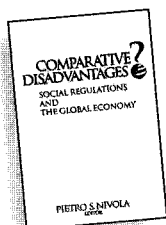
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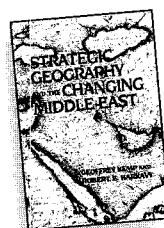
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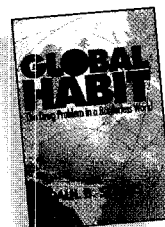
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